

Problem Solving + Passion Fuel Healthcare Design



We all have a healthcare experience. Sometimes it's a joyous occasion, like when James Beukema stood by his wife's side as they welcomed their baby girl into the world. Other times, it's with worry and concern, as Ryan Ramos experienced when his mother was hospitalized with Alzheimer's.

Beukema and Ramos are just two of the millions of people each year who spend time in an inpatient hospital environment. They also happen to be part of a team designing spatial solutions for Steelcase Health. They have spent their careers developing a rich understanding of how the healthcare environment can help support people who spend time in hospitals, and their personal experiences add to the empathy they feel for the people who rely on their healthcare designs.

"I always wanted to do this job because this is something that actually impacts people's lives."

RYAN RAMOS | Industrial Design Director, Steelcase Health

Beukema and Ramos work within a unique set of constraints. They must consider health code, cleanability, functionality, clinician requirements, storage and space optimization. And yet, despite these challenges, they are tasked with creating a better healthcare experience.

First-hand experiences helped Beukema and Ramos relate to an issue in the healthcare industry today: supporting a family member in the patient room. Beukema recalls spending the night in the hospital after his daughter was born.

“The furniture was uncomfortable, so sleep for that night was impossible, as my wife’s care partner I didn’t feel thought of — I was more like a potted plant in the corner.”

JAMES BEUKEMA | Senior Industrial Designer, Steelcase Health

Family can be thrown into stressful situations when they hope to advocate for the patient, remember the patient’s progress and share information to the doctor, all while maintaining some sense of normalcy – working, eating, sleeping and socializing. That’s what gave Beukema and Ramos a key insight: look at the patient and their family as one unit.

“By reducing the stress on family members, we can create an environment that not only supports them but also better supports the patient and clinician,” says Beukema.



As part of the Steelcase Health team, Ramos and Beukema drew upon their own health care experiences and observational research from a variety of healthcare environments to develop a deep understanding of the family member and what they need. These insights helped lead to the creation of Surround, a collection of healthcare furnishings designed to support the many roles family members play while caring for the patient.



Each detail of Surround, according to Ramos, is designed to be approachable and refined as well as functional in a clinical environment. Many hospital visitors spend a lot of time watching television. Observations showed they often did so in an uncomfortable slouch. To help with this, the design team added the high-arm to Surround for back support. In addition, the team was able to find fabrics that felt comfortable and familiar but could still withstand bleach cleaners needed in a clinical setting.

“All of the decisions were rooted in observations and experience,” said Beukema. “We approach our decisions based on the user’s experience.”



Ramos is especially gratified with how people instinctively interact with Surround for the purposes it was designed—moving the integrated sliding table, resting their back against the high arm, and naturally knowing to grab the handle and deploy the sleep surface.

“We knew that we would have the design right when we said we would put it in our house,” said Beukema.

Judges awarded Surround the Best in Show NeoCon Gold Award for 2017. To learn more about Surround, watch our [design video](#) and visit the [Surround website](#).



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