

Beyond CEU's: the Value of the Healthcare Design Conference

This post is by Amy Griffin, the 2013 winner of the [AAHID/Steelcase Health Student Fellowship Award](#).

Can artwork contribute to a healing environment? Conversely, are certain types of artwork not appropriate for healthcare facilities? Studies show that the answer to each of these questions is “yes.” Artwork is far beyond aesthetic. In fact, uplifting images (especially of nature) can serve as a positive distraction, lower blood pressure and anxiety levels, and relax patients by capturing their attention. It is important for designers to understand the “power” of artwork because studies (including my own) *also* show that some artwork (e.g. abstract paintings or images with animals staring at the viewer) may be disturbing and therefore cultivate anxiety. Design research, such as this, gives us valuable insight into how the built environment impacts the healthcare experience.

Most designers don't have the time to conduct research of their own. But, I believe taking the time to gather current research findings is an important step in the design process. One way to do that is to attend the annual [Healthcare Design Conference](#).

My invitation to the 2013 Healthcare Design Conference came with the [AAHID/Steelcase Health fellowship grant](#). The fellowship not only gave me the opportunity to attend the conference, but to speak and share my design research. As a recent graduate, one of the greatest benefits to attending the conference was the opportunity to get my name out amongst the professional community. The healthcare design conference has several benefits that vary from person to person but the general consensus is that the design conference is:

1. Inspiring
2. A great chance for networking
3. A great place for exposure to new products and services
4. A chance to take CEU's

Beyond that:

It gives A&D professionals the ability to ask questions specific to the tasks at hand back at the office.

Each of the sessions I attended offered time for the audience to ask questions. Invariably, designers would raise their hands and ask questions that were pertinent to their current projects. In one session, a man stood up and asked if the researchers had found any hard facts that the environment actually *improves* outcomes. This man was looking for solid facts, which in turn, he could take home and use to pitch a project.

No doubt, with all of the choices for sessions, when you register to attend this year there will be something that speaks to a project you are working on. The return for the investment of time you spend at the conference will come at the next meeting you have with your client. They will appreciate all of the facts you used to back up your design decisions.

It allows A&D professionals to connect with the facts in a tangible way.

Another benefit of the conference is that it allows design professionals to actually experience design. For example, this past year there were several hands-on workshops. One workshop offered practical advice on how to incorporate evidence-based design into your design practice. Another workshop gave attendees the opportunity to interact with new products - to see for themselves how the products operate. Visiting the exhibit hall also gave attendees an opportunity to experience products, communicate with vendors, and learn what products/services are trending and which ones are phasing out.

Yes, the conference is inspiring. And some of the sessions do give attendees CEU credits, which are essential in our profession. But the most valuable part of the conference is the wealth of information that is poured on us every day we are there. We leave much more informed of new findings than when we came in. The knowledge and insight we gain during those 3 days is enough to propel us to innovate, and what we give back because of it makes the healthcare experience better.

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