

Empath™ : Designed for the Needs of Patients and Caregivers

In healthcare, every interaction between a patient and caregiver matters.

Throughout our blog series, *Mobility and Safety in Patient Seating*, Post 1 closely examined Progressive Mobility and the positive outcomes it provides for patients while Post 2 reviewed the significant safety risks posed to clinicians while moving patients, a true dichotomy. An additional post by Cameron Young of Steelcase Health described his personal experience with patient room seating while recovering from major abdominal surgery.

For its latest product design, the Empath™ recliner, Steelcase Health invested more than 2,000 hours of observation, photography, and video research into what occurs between patient and caregiver as it relates to the recliner — a central component of progressive mobility, patient care and recovery.

For the patient, moving from bed-to-chair is a crucial step toward wellness, putting the patient one step closer to going home. At the same time, patient transfer is an inherently difficult, dynamic process. It's dynamic due to the sheer number of times a patient is moved from the bed to the chair and back again. Factor in the physical limitations of the patient, and the potential for injury — to patient and caregiver — is clear.

Yes, moving the patient from the bed to the chair is a significant milestone for the patient, both mentally and physically! If you've ever been a patient, you can recall that this moment feels like it requires the same effort needed to climb Mount Everest, but it also provides a huge feeling of satisfaction.

The bed-to-chair transfers are also demanding on the caregivers. Steelcase Health researchers witnessed caregivers straining backs and patients bruising hips during bed-to-chair transfers. Malfunctioning or easily broken chair mechanisms caused even more discomfort and difficulty. "In essence, our role is to turn our careful observations into insight-based designs," said Steelcase Health's Director of Product Design, Alan Rheault. "This leads to better, safer, higher quality healthcare experiences."

It is these moments that Steelcase Health helps support by understanding people and asking whether the environment is doing everything it can to support their needs. "Watching caregivers transfer patients from the bed to the chair and back again was an 'a-ha' moment for the research and design team," said Rheault.

In response to the research findings, Steelcase Health designed Empath, an important tool for caregivers and a step toward wellness for patients.

"We considered the chair as a holistic healthcare solution — not just an assembly of available, off-the-shelf parts. We used our engineering expertise to improve, enhance and ensure a higher level of quality in Empath, while at the same time making it feature-rich with options appropriate for a wide variety of healthcare environments," said Rheault.

Empath was built with thoughtful, user-friendly designer features.

For caregivers, Empath offers a newly designed central lock mechanism that can be activated from the front on either side and makes this recliner intuitive and easy to use. Optional dual-folding arms allow for easy patient transfers from either side. A drainage bag holder and IV pole are integrated into the chair for increased functionality, and as an additional safety feature, Trendelenburg is also available.

For patients, highly durable yet soft “I-skin” arm material helps reduce injuries. Long, easy to reach reclining paddles and an optional adjustable headrest give patients comfort and control. Sculpted grip arms assist in getting in and out and make the chair a welcome destination.

Its steel construction makes Empath one of the most durable recliners on the market. In addition, Empath sports the most fluid casters available today — making this recliner quiet and easy to move, even with someone in it.

From a style standpoint, Empath presents a clean, sophisticated look in a compact, compressed footprint. It offers a refined, inviting aesthetic that’s neither overly residential nor overly clinical.

Empath is a complete recliner, designed from the ground up as an integrated, holistic solution and easily fits into nearly any healthcare environment. For patients, Empath is inviting and comfortable. For caregivers, Empath is safe and easy to use, which provides them with a sense of confidence to help create a truly healing environment.

And, recognizing that we’re blogging about our own product on our blog, which is rare, we want you to know that our industry has recognized Empath as a great product, too. Steelcase Health recently won its fourth Nightingale Award at the annual Healthcare Design 2011 Conference, and this time it was for Empath.

So beyond the thousands of hours of research into Empath, as well as our marketplace understanding, we’ve had many happy Empath test-drivers, and the results remain affirming and positive. Empath is not just a recliner, it’s a tool designed to help patients and caregivers have greater mobility and safety while assisting them in achieving their desired outcomes.

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