

Healthcare Design: Crucial to Healing

A key question in healthcare design is, what can we do as designers to help patients heal faster? In order for a hospital to serve as many patients as possible, and limit readmits, that hospital needs to be providing care that is as efficient as it is effective. Having a healthcare environment that reinforces those goals, of top-notch care combined with a soothing and comfortable environment, is a boon to the healing process. Here are some ways hospitals are using design to help improve their healthcare delivery:

- In the Mills-Peninsula Medical Center, designers used evidence-based design principles to build a patient-centered healthcare facility focused on the idea that patients heal better when their physical and emotional comfort is maximized. Patients at Mills-Peninsula receive 100-percent fresh air for ventilation; single-occupancy rooms for privacy; large windows to bring in light and provide vistas to the outdoors; exterior healing gardens and walking paths; and strategies to minimize noise and infection. “Patients recover more quickly if they have views of nature. Single-room occupancy works better as there is less risk for medical error, for infection, and on the human side healing is more rapid,” remarks Kevin Day, senior architect from Anshen + Allen. “Patient-centered care affected all our decisions.”
- The belief in the healing power of single rooms and natural light is widespread. Natural light can not only lower electricity costs but also help patients heal more quickly, keeping other costs down, while single room occupancy is important for infection control, and also for patient comfort. Recreating a home-like environment, featuring amenities like wireless internet, temperature control, and even video game consoles, is an increasingly popular way to help patients heal faster.
- Personalized patient rooms are becoming more of a trend as well. A personal touch, such as a favorite magazine, color, even music, that can be added to the patient room goes a long way in making the patient feel more comfortable. Patient communication boards can display patient and doctor names and give updates on the weather and news of the day, and as the patient feels comfortable in their surroundings, they feel more assured about the care they will receive.
- The importance of design stretches beyond just patient rooms and waiting areas. You’d be better off without an EHR system than to have one that is poorly designed. When used properly, electronic health records can alert physicians of a patient’s prior conditions and current medications; things that can help him make a correct diagnosis. Without that information, the physician’s task in treating a patient is more arduous; tracking down patient histories through mountains of paperwork is time-consuming. But if that information is given to the physician, and it’s incorrect, that is a potentially very serious problem. That’s why the way EHR’s are designed and function is so important. Lives depend on that alert popping up and attracting the physician’s attention, but if it doesn’t....it needs a better design.

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