

Redesigning the Exam Room for Mutual Participation

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Americans make nearly one billion trips to the doctor every year, nearly three trips annually for every man, woman and child. It's a universal scene—the exam table with its crinkly paper, the iconic doctor's stool and a stiff chair for a family member. Maybe there's a computer mounted to the wall or on a desk.

Replace the computer with a paper chart and this could be straight out of the 1950s—an era of booming healthcare construction. Nearly 70 years ago, the types of care patients needed were different. Expectations were different. Technology was different. Even the way clinicians and patients interacted was different. Yet many medical exam room designs today still reflect these outdated needs, failing to deliver optimal experiences for patients, family members and clinicians alike.

Today, exam rooms must be reconceived in the context of doctor-patient interaction models to support modern needs.

One model, known as Mutual Participation, is the focus of a study by Steelcase Health researchers and led to a new set of design principles, exam room concepts and ultimately to new product ideas, all created to transform exam rooms into spaces that meet today's needs. Typical exam environments enable a fading model of care, despite clinicians' desire to partner with patients and families, and the need for families and patients to be active participants. Let's investigate the factors driving the need for change, and set the scene for the exam rooms of tomorrow.

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This is an excerpt of a story included in a new publication "Exam + Waiting Experiences Reimagined." by Steelcase Health. [Start here to get the full booklet.](#)

Get the Booklet

In this new publication, Steelcase Health explores two key issues facing healthcare. The first is how to evolve the exam room from an outdated space to one that builds new levels of patient trust and confidence—making them active participants in their care. The second article involves the waiting room experience: turning it from a passive environment to one that actively supports our physical, technological, and emotional needs.

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