

# Contemporary Trends in Healthcare Design

Patient-centricity, durability and sustainability among the trends leading healthcare into the future

By Rebecca Donner

As designers and manufacturers continue to push creative boundaries and reevaluate design principles, the standards of healthcare design have been revised over the last decade to create more patient-centric healing spaces.

By questioning typical design schemes within the healthcare industry, designers have opened the door to fresh, inspiring trends that are taking medical services to new heights.

## Hospitality-Inspired Healthcare

Increased knowledge in evidence-based design theories has given designers ample reason to reconsider healthcare design norms. Designers are now blending healthcare and hospitality design elements to create more comfortable patient environments that also comply with healthcare codes. Elements such as color, lighting, wallcoverings, architectural details, outdoor interaction, noise control installations, artwork, and spatial and wayfinding floor layout are used to create an at-home feel for patients.

At the Loma Linda University Medical Center in Murrieta, Calif., the interior design is enhanced with materials from the hospitality industry to achieve a well-rounded evidence-based design scheme. For example, the facility's two-story main lobby looks more like an exclusive resort than a hospital, with custom espresso veneered paneled ceiling set off against white walls. The multicolored and patterned terrazzo floor is accented with espresso-hued sofas and cube club chairs upholstered in spa blue fabric. Custom lighting, designed just for the lobby, brings it all together. In addition, each patient room and common area has window views to let in an abundant amount of light, giving patients and staff members the ability to connect with the outdoors, which is a vital part of healing and maintaining work efficiency.



Loma Linda University Medical Center's two-story lobby, inspired by hospitality design elements, has the look and feel of a luxury hotel.

As medical equipment and treatments become more mobile, designers are also creating more efficient workflow layouts that require fewer steps for caregivers, physicians and staff to carry out duties. In addition to fewer steps for staff, wayfinding design tactics, such as the floor pattern installed at the Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center, are becoming a more common way to direct a natural flow of patients into various areas of the facility.

Evidence-based design theories show that an individual's feelings or emotions are influenced by perceptions of environmental surroundings, which has led facilities to place more priority (and dollars) on artwork. Designers choose artwork that will stimulate uplifting emotions or momentarily take a patient's mind away from a problem – and they are exploring unconventional design elements to create this stimulation. Soothing artwork, such as the sky-themed overhead installation in the imaging center of the Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare Cancer Center, and refined finishes are positive distractions for patients in high-anxiety areas or rooms otherwise devoid of comfort.



The sky installation at Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare Cancer Center imaging area is a positive distraction for patients.



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### Interchangeable, Durable Products Are in High Demand

An interior space typically has a life span of seven to 10 years before it begins to look tired and outdated. However, renovations of an entire facility this often are usually financially impossible. To stretch the facility's budget and its interior's attractive life, designers are more often using interchangeable products that easily allow spaces to be adapted over time. For example, within the last decade, carpet tiles – a material widely used in healthcare interiors to create warmer, quieter environments – have become the more popular commercialized flooring choice over standard broadloom carpet. Not only do carpet tiles offer more stylish design options, but tiles are also easier to install, replace and recycle and require less attic stock than broadloom, which gives a facility the flexibility to change flooring over time.

Creating a timeless, functional space is a designer's ultimate goal, and using products that can withstand above-average wear and tear is an important part of keeping a design intact for years to come. An aesthetically pleasing space should use durable, code-compliant materials that continue to look just as good as the day they were installed. To meet this need, manufacturers have engineered longer-lasting materials such as scuff-proof paint, wood laminate flooring and furniture, rubber bumpers that are colored throughout to resist stress cracking, and innovative materials that allow designers to create a lasting design.

### Green Is King

As society becomes more environmentally friendly, the healthcare industry is moving in the same direction by making conscious efforts to use green products when possible. Healthcare leaders have a deeper awareness today of the long-term financial and environmental benefits of going green, and creating eco-friendly spaces is more achievable and affordable than ever before. Manufacturers have developed a wide selection of LEED-certified products. The greening of healthcare facilities will become even more prevalent in the following years as the healthcare community becomes more LEED-savvy and works to reduce its carbon footprint.

### Master Planning the Interior

Amid current economic trends, legislative changes and turnovers in the administration of healthcare facilities, healthcare



With endless, flexible design options, carpet tiles are in high demand.



Interior glass walls enhance outdoor views and natural light to create a more comfortable healing space.

organizations are scaling down new construction and full-campus renovations, instead opting for phased renovations. To offset the potential for distorted and mismatched design schemes that can occur during phased renovations, interior design master plans have gained tremendous support over the last few years. Master plans ensure a cohesive design throughout all renovation phases by documenting and specifying every detail of each renovated space, such as floor plans, finish, drapery and furniture specifications, floor patterns, wall elevations, and flame-spread information.

Healthcare leaders are seeing the benefits of master planning as it 1) keeps renovation plans consistent throughout administrative changes; 2) ensures that the interior does not suffer if designers are changed midway through the phased renovation; 3) gives maintenance staff complete knowledge of facility products, resulting in more efficient cleaning and repairs; 4) decreases attic stock, since a complete record of products is available for reordering; and 5) facilitates continual design changes due to evolving healthcare codes with readily available manufacturer information that is specified in the plan.

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### The Rise of the Freestanding ED

By extending the location of a facility, healthcare organizations have found a way to capture more patients and create greater ease of access for those looking for quick medical service. As essentially bedless hospitals that offer high-quality outpatient procedures, freestanding emergency departments have become a desirable commodity within the healthcare industry. By accom-

modating patients who are looking to avoid the wait and formalities of a standard emergency room, freestanding emergency departments will continue to gain popularity and support throughout communities and healthcare organizations that are looking to expand ventures.

### Endless Possibilities

More than ever, the healthcare community is changing perspectives on what patients

expect and what to expect from designers. With new trends continually emerging and a growing support for outside-of-the-box design concepts, it's an open playing field for creative design and amenities to take healthcare services to a new level. **FC**

*Rebecca Donner is the founder and principal of Inner Design Studio of Nashville, Tenn., which has designed the interiors of more than 500 healthcare facilities throughout the nation.*

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