

## After 5 | From the Source

# New consumerism demands integrated cancer-care environments

Changes in the expectations of patients is leading the design of healthcare facilities to satisfy customers, as well as heal them.

By Constance Nestor

In case you're wondering, yes, the new consumerism has arrived. It's what's driving cancer-care services and facility design today. Led by the baby boomer generation, consumer satisfaction is likely to be the principal value guiding healthcare facility design in the foreseeable future.

This Internet savvy group of consumers are the most informed—and the most demanding—healthcare service users that providers have seen. They're quality conscious customers who are busy surfing the Net to check out hospital and physician quality and patient-outcome reports. Don't think for a minute that the new consumers are not shopping around for the very best cancer care that money can buy.

This segment of the population is expanding. The population 85-years and older is the fastest growing segment of our population. There's even a prediction that by the year 2020, age 65 will be considered middle age. A new brand of super seniors is expected to surface; boomers in their 80s that are participating in sports and leading full lives. Patient demand will increase the need for the latest drugs and treatments delivered in uplifting and healing environments.

To respond to this consumer demand, large capital investments are expected to be made in chronic-care treatment facilities, including cancer treatment. The cancer centers will be developed as ambulatory care facilities for the most part, and loaded up with the latest technologies. The evolution of specialty cancer-care facilities could be vastly different than what we've seen before.

Heavy diagnostic and treatment areas, in addition to patient and family care and sleeping rooms, are components in some centers. As the demand for critical-care beds continues to rise, some facilities may be designed to include significant acute care (e.g., hospital) nursing environments as part of the equation.

## The integrated cancer center |

The premier cancer-care specialty centers will, of course, be planned as integrated cancer centers. As the baby boomers approach their super-senior years, the provision of integrated cancer services will be more important than ever.



RTKL healthcare projects include the Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin (top) and the Barbara A. Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit, Michigan (bottom).

An integrated facility will be capable of providing comprehensive, efficient cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment services including genetic counseling. From a facility perspective, this translates into screening, diagnostic/treatment, physician/clinical, patient support services, administrative and storage space.

Patient convenience: Patient access and convenience can

not be ignored. Cancer patients are usually weak and lack energy. Ground-level facilities with parking near the cancer center entrance are best. Patient support services should include a patient education/resource center, social work, psychology, pastoral care and nutrition-counseling office space.

**Privacy issues:** Regardless of the type of cancer-care space being planned, patient privacy is a must. The recent Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act has served as a catalyst that has increased healthcare provider awareness regarding a patient's right to privacy. Research supports that patient outcomes are linked to the psychosocial experiences of healthcare settings.

The natural environment or experiences with nature have restorative effects. A sense of privacy can make the difference to a patient suffering from cancer. A patient who feels victimized and fatalistic craves all levels of consideration and opportunities for reprieve. To truly comfort the patient, relieve anxiety and promote patient healing, integration of the highest quality and efficiencies, atmosphere of respect, understanding and partnership must occur.

**The nursing shortage:** One of the major changes in the industry that has adversely impacted healthcare everywhere is the lack of healthcare workers and the trend is expected to continue. As a result, healthcare providers have taken signifi-

cant measures to increase staff retention, including various financial incentive plans. And last but not least, a supportive work environment can go a long way in reducing stress and providing comforts for healthcare personnel that will promote staff loyalty and retention.

"Backstage" staff break areas and efficient space plans will support staff retention and satisfaction objectives. A key patient and family "dissatisfier" is that of staff who are chatting merrily about their fun weekend at the beach in the presence of cancer patients. Yet staff need to chat and vent: to decompress in times of stress. They need private lounges and meeting rooms where they can go to catch their breathe before resuming patient care on a tough day.

**Supporting the family:** The family role in patient care is predicted to increase substantially due to the spiraling personnel shortages. Astute providers are considering care suites, where the family can reside for a few days with the hospice patient. Compassionate-care facilities can provide a home away from home for out-of-town patients and families. Patients and their families enjoy a caring environment where they may accomplish daily living activities and receive emotional support, while receiving medical care. Family support areas are critical in an age of healthcare staff shortages. Family will be needed to participate in the care of their loved ones.

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### Introducing robotics |

If the anticipated staffing shortages continue, robots will likely accent the human touch in providing any number of tasks in the healthcare environment of the future. Robots have already changed the entire process of medication delivery. Robotics are being employed in the research, surgical, procedural, imaging, rehabilitation and other healthcare environments. To name just a few tasks, robots will be able to clean and bathe patients, respond to food and beverage requests and services, change bed linen, refurbish supply areas, assist patients in and out of bed and with walking.

More demanding consumers, personnel shortages, changing reimbursements and emerging technologies are all forces that will continue to directly affect our capital resources and facility-development capability. When the decision is made to invest in cancer-care environments, the savvy owner will pay attention to the new consumerism and its demands. |MWREN



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