

MANAGED CARE *& Cancer*

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Healing Environment Provides a Competitive Edge

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As the cost of delivering health care continues to rise, providers will experience significant pressures to find new and more effective ways to deliver quality cost-effective care. To meet these challenges, the health care community will require creative clinical measures and well-designed compassion-driven facilities to ensure projected returns on investment in this very competitive environment.

Research supports the theory that, to some extent, patient outcomes are linked to the psychosocial experiences received in health care settings.[1,2] Thus, it is important to create a soothing atmosphere to relieve anxiety and promote patient healing. A successful full-service facility offering an environment that caters to all the needs of patients and their families will be able to capture market share from less-equipped competitors.

Many cancer care providers, prompted by the need to attract patients and enhance outcomes, have jumped on the



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bandwagon to improve the quality of their cancer facilities. They have marshaled their resources to provide the amenities of natural light, water events, textural interiors, thought-provoking artwork, waiting room aquariums, and well-maintained plants.

Creating cheerful linear accelerator rooms and, for children, dressing the machines up as characters, such as "Fred, the Happy-Faced Accelerator," can make a big difference to patients. Why must all procedure rooms be dark and vault-like? We purchase multicolored PCs for our teenagers, why not try colorful, interesting treatment rooms?

LDRP (labor-delivery-recovery-post-

partum) rooms have been made to look homey by disguising medical equipment behind mahogany shutters and by furnishing them like hotel lounges, but procedure rooms for cancer patients are often cold intimidating spaces affording no comfort to the patient.

Surveys show that elderly patients prefer bright colors and large-print signage. Motivational color schemes can alleviate the onset of depression. Also, the interior décor and ambiance should be soft, highlighted with muted tones. Try replacing those noisy, stimulating fountains with quiet, trickling, artful streams.

Ceiling design is also crucial. How many of our patients lie supine for long periods with only ceiling tiles to contemplate? Designers might try adapting ceilings with contemplative art or providing a large-screen video of calming scenes.

Ambient lighting is demonstrably better in clinical settings, but why not let the patients control the dimmer switch according to how much light they want

for the particular time and mood. Likewise, using special interior lighting that imitates sunshine is best for promoting a state of mental well being.

FAMILY AND STAFF AREAS

Personalized family care and support areas that provide privacy, while encouraging the therapy of conversation, are much needed. To enhance the patient's sense of control, provide choices: secluded vs public chemotherapy space with room for patient and family belongings, or stimulating vs quiet waiting rooms with views of nature vs television.

Astute, forward-looking providers are considering palliative care suites, where the family can reside for a few days with the hospice patient[3] and participate in the care of their loved one.

"Backstage" break areas for hospital staff designed for comfort, access, and efficiency will support staff retention and satisfaction objectives. A key patient and family "dissatisfier" is hospital staff who chat merrily about their fun weekend in the presence of cancer patients

EXPANSION COSTS

Before undertaking a costly facility expansion process, operations should be reviewed for their rate-of-exchange quotient. Sometimes a perceived space need may be avoided after an operational inefficiency is corrected. Consider operating more hours per day and expanding week-

end scheduling.


When growth and expansion do become necessary, providers will have a new opportunity to improve on their patient care environments for the future.

There is a national priority for "greener" or environmentally sound buildings in terms of health, environment, and economics. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has ranked indoor air pollution as one of the highest health risks confronting the public. Filtration systems, building materials, and methods of installation must be properly researched and specified to ensure a healthy interior environment. EPA standards must be met or exceeded for fresh air changes in all habitable spaces.

ROBOTICS

If the anticipated staffing shortages continue, robots will likely be used to perform any number of tasks in the health care environment of the future. To name just a few tasks,[4] robots will be able to clean and bathe patients, respond to food and beverage requests and services, change bed linen, refurbish supply areas, and assist patients in and out of bed and with walking. In the future, robots may even administer medications to patients.

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University are working on an "intelligent walker," termed "nursebot," that can both navigate and physically support elderly patients.[5]

The costs associated with great design are negligible in light of the visible benefits that you can bring your patients and their families. To be truly competitive in today's market, cancer care providers should look more carefully at patients' needs. Innovative thinking is required to meet these challenges. 

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