



**HOW TO IMPROVE
THE PATIENT
EXPERIENCE FROM
THE CAR PARK TO**

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for
THE SUNBURY HEALTH
CENTRE**

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Thoughts for a New Building

The design of a facility/structure with its fixed and moveable components, can have a significant impact on human performance - especially on the health and safety of employees, patients, and families.

It is considered that there is a link between the physical environment and patient and staff outcomes – reduced stress and increased effectiveness.

A visit to any medical health facility is, for some patients, a place of stress or maybe even fear. Ask most patients what their first reaction is to describe a Hospital visit and its waiting area, for instance, and the likely response will be the opposite to 'relaxed' or 'comfortable'.

Whilst one might not be able to remove stress completely, there are ways to make the waiting area a more relaxed and tranquil space. Some patients suffer what is known as 'white coat anxiety', and anything to make the visit more homely and relaxing could be of significant help to these patients.

First impressions do, in fact count ... and the waiting area, particularly, can leave a lasting imprint. Boosting the mood, feel and presentation of the area is important, and can say a great deal about the Hospital and its commitment to its patients.

Using simple design principles and techniques can make the whole space a more relaxed and calm environment, as well as providing a ready-made education opportunity.

The appearance of any reception area is fundamental, but is almost more important in a Health Centre or a Hospital. This does not necessarily mean the removal of all existing fitments but just an update.

If patients and staff become involved in the early process of building and design of these premises, they can have an opportunity to influence the design to reflect preferences.

Consult the staff re. design to ensure functionality and security, as well as a welcoming environment for patients.

Owing to constant change, the building should have capacity and flexibility to allow future change and expansion.

Access and Movement ... Pedestrian and Vehicular

- Pedestrian 'flow' needs to be the simplest and quickest, whilst maintaining security and supervision.
- Pedestrian access, proximity to public transport, and the availability of car parking is important.
- Car parking space/s for the disabled close to the entrance is required.
- Similarly, spaces at the entrance to the building for Ambulances.
- Movement for service vehicles, including refuse and delivery vehicles to be accommodated.
- The entrance is safe and inviting.

Security

A clear, well-illuminated main entry and exit access for members of staff opening and closing the building and operating security systems. These should generally open on to public areas to maximise external security.

Create a separate staff entrance to avoid passing through any patient areas. Again, taking into account the minimisation of the risk of intruders or personal attack.

CCTV could be present in principal circulation areas.

Atmosphere

The provision of an attractive interior appropriately planned and supervised will help minimise acts of vandalism or carelessness.

Provide a pleasant and beneficial environment for patients.

- Good lighting should be throughout the building.
- Pleasing colour scheme
- Artwork
- Comfortable temperature

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

It is important to establish:

- Ground floor wheelchair access
- Wheelchair-accessible toilets
- Ease of movement within the areas
- Facilities for people with hearing and sight impairments
- Lift access to upper floors, with accessible controls within the lift
- Access to the fire evacuation points are clear and safe
- Adequate facilities for the elderly and young children, including nappy-changing and feeding facilities – if considered appropriate

Lobby, Reception and Waiting Areas

- The Lobby area should be as open-plan as possible, making use of natural light, greenery, water and background music. The more cramped and enclosed, the less welcoming it will be.
- Flooring is very important to the design of any area. Avoid drab and dull colours.
- The Reception desk is the most important point of contact and must be a welcoming space.
- Reception and administration areas are often allocated insufficient space within to operate.
- Adequate lighting should be provided for clinical and administrative activities.
- An appropriate working environment is critical in order that the staff is not isolated.

- Distance between services and activities that are linked should be minimised for the convenience of both staff and patients.
- Consider acoustic and visual privacy, both of which are important to patient confidentiality, reducing patient anxiety.
- Patients should be able to hold discussions in reasonable privacy. This can be achieved by careful design and acoustic insulation.
- Patient toilets should be located nearby.
- An alarm system is in place for staff needing urgent assistance

Some points to consider:

- Ergonomic design of Reception desk and seating areas.
- Clear visibility of the entrance door and the approach to the entrance – in order to activate door opening/closing/locking mechanisms not only for the building's safety, but also to assist patients/visitors.
- Adequate space be provided for the number of staff likely to be working at peak times – typically four-square meters per person.
- For safety reasons, a clear line of retreat should be provided that does not involve crossing public areas.
- Ensure good heating/ventilation.
- Provision of information and reading materials is present.
- Ensure that no furniture or equipment is too close to the Reception area so that they cannot be used as a weapon – e.g. Fire extinguishers.
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The Waiting Area

- Waiting areas should be designed to be comfortable, soothing environments
- For many patients, waiting can be an anxious or distressing time. It is, therefore, essential that these areas are interesting and comfortable, and reduce any sense of being neglected.
- Seating should be firm and of a varying height to suit the elderly as well as the young.
- Arm-rests must be fixed and sturdy for support.
- Notices and leaflets should be displayed clearly and placed in a discreet position for privacy.

- Direct access to the toilet facilities should be available from the waiting area.
- Floor finishes should be carefully chosen to reduce accidents from slipping or tripping.

Human Resources and Management

Attention must be paid to providing an uplifting atmosphere for staff, patients and visitors, through the use of:

- Natural light
- Quality materials
- Colour
- Artwork
- Plants
- Space for staff comfort and relaxation
- Access to drinking water
- Hot water and radiators should be thermostatically controlled to no higher than 43 degrees Centigrade
- IT equipment and workstation to comply with the latest VDU regulations
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Some points to consider:

- Children's Area ... if appropriate
- Colour and décor
- Cleanliness, clutter, neatness and presentation
- Notices, notifications, information screens and signage
- Plants
- Reading materials
- Water cooler / dispenser and relevant disposal units

Communications and Signage

This is an opportunity to improve communications with patients at a time when they are available and receptive.

Keep the area tidy and ensure that information is in-date. Nobody learns from clutter and confusion.

Good signage always obeys three simple rules:

1. The information is clear
2. The information is accurate
3. The information is where the patient can see it

Ensure that the signage is appropriate and clear – particularly so for the visually impaired and those with learning difficulties.

Include the use of colour and tonal contrasts for the visually impaired.

Do not, therefore, handwrite signs. Either pay for signs to be printed professionally or type and laminate them.

Unify the presentation of all notices. Create a template and consider layout. Where possible, the font size should be a minimum of 14/16 pitch to accommodate the sight impaired:

- Use sans serif fonts
- Do not use italics
- Do not use light coloured typefaces
- Do not use 'flamboyant or decorative' handwriting-style fonts
- Do not use sentences printed in capital letters. One or two words, however, is acceptable
- Keep information short
- Do not spit words – eg: no hyphenation
- Page layouts should be simple and clear

Information Screen – if needed

- With all the changes taking place in the NHS and the delivery of primary care, a screen can provide a vital channel to keep patients up-to-date. It is also a great medium for promoting health awareness and seasonal campaigns like flu jabs and measles vaccinations.
- Regularly update the information on these screens – otherwise regular patients will become bored.

Colour and Décor

Both colour and décor reflect emotions and are genuinely important. Start white walls are not the most comforting.

Warm colour tones should be used to make the patients feel 'more comfortable and at home'.

The most relaxing colours are generally believed to be cool shades, such as green or blue. Designers and Psychologists all agree that blues and greens make one feel calm, balanced and less emotional. These colours are popular in hospitals, test centres, television stations and ease nerves and attenuate harsh emotions.

It is believed that these green and blue colours have an effect on wavelengths in man's brain chemistry, linguistic associations and cultural meaning.

Plantings ... *Living things display life*

Place a few green plants around the waiting room to make the space feel more relaxing and calming.

If using planters, arrange them amongst the seating to give a semblance of privacy.

Ensure that the plants are well maintained. Dead plants do not encourage confidence! Make it a duty of one or two members of staff to tend to the plants.

A local florist may well be happy to provide and/or maintain the plants on a regular basis – and allow them to display a small advertisement in gratitude for this service.

Artwork

Some local artwork from the community would enhance and upgrade the waiting area.

A simple way to obtain artwork, at no cost, is to use the reception area as an exhibition space. Local artists might then appreciate being able to display their work for a period of 2-4 months, and possibly even sell their work from this exhibition.

Artwork can include photography of local scenery, landscapes, around the world, local events, for instance.

Books and Magazines

Reading is the best way to relax and even 6 minutes can be enough to reduce the stress levels by more than two-thirds. It has proved to work better than listening to music, going for a walk, or settling down with a cup of tea!

Make it the responsibility of a member of staff to check the reading material for viability and to remove material once dated or damaged.

Bookcases can be used to sell old books for charity. These must be clean, dust-free and tidy, and offer a wide selection of choices. Patients could be encouraged to bring in books – as long as they are suitable publications.

Staff Facilities

It is important for staff to rest and re-energise and space should be available for this.

Provide an area for:

- Separate access – isolated from main public circulation areas
- Refreshments and appropriate storage and facilities
- A sink
- Relaxation – tables and chairs
- Meetings and conversations away from public areas
- Information / bulletin board
- Secure lockable storage for personal property
- Staff toilets – if feasible
- Staff training room with facilities

Fire and Emergency Procedures

- Clear information about fire evacuation procedures and other similar emergencies are on display.
- Fire safety standards and precautions are in place
- Safe exit from the premises is ensured
- Regular fire alarm and extinguisher testing

- A disaster management plan for communications is in place – IT failure etc. – how will staff and patients access services if IT and telephones fail
- Security for drugs, records, prescriptions pads and pads of Doctors' statements
- Procedures are in place for utility failures, fire and flooding

Drugs

If drugs are on site, ensure security is in place for drugs, records, prescriptions pads and pads of Doctors' statements

Storage

Adequate and appropriate storage space be designed for all requirements.

- Storage should not be permitted on floors or in corridors
- High or low storage should be avoided to reduce the risk of manual handling injuries and accidents
- Cabinets should be fixed so that they cannot topple
- Clinical waste should be stored separately and securely

Cleanliness and Maintenance

Poor housekeeping can cause injuries and contribute to low standards of health. Cleaning and maintenance staff should be consulted about their needs and appropriate provision allocated. Storage of equipment should not be accessible by the public.

- Cleaners' cupboards should provide storage of materials and equipment
- A sink
- Separate storage areas for basic building and grounds maintenance – if appropriate – and not accessible by the public
- Adequate space should be provided for maintenance and access to boilers, controls, etc.
- Secure external storage space for clinical waste
- Easy-clean, quality surfaces should be provided on walls and floors
- Attention to be paid to the safety of electrical wiring and equipment