

Reading Lesson

B2 Services: Designing Health

Reading

Read the text about architecture and health care. Is there a wellness factor behind good design?

Designing Health

Healthcare providers are always interested in what factors make a difference to the outcomes of their patients. Architects, in particular, are becoming more interested in how they, through the design of healthcare buildings such as hospitals, can create an environment that helps people recover faster. In hospitals and clinics, which previously were places for the sick to go to wait out their illness and possibly never recover, we now have facilities for people to go to get better and learn to live better.



These places have focused on providing the best treatment in a sterile, controlled environment. For patients, this often means being in a bed on a ward with other sick people. Nurses and doctors can visit large numbers of patients more easily when a hospital is organized like that, but it may not be the best thing for patients. It's possible that this focus on providing health care is not as effective as focusing on providing health. In general, we are becoming more aware of the effect that people's surroundings can have on their physical and mental health.

One aspect of design that architects are interested in is providing access to nature. Being able to access open green spaces lowers stress. It also creates a space for walking, which is often missing in many traditional hospitals and which can play a big part in encouraging recovery. Even providing a view of the natural world can help. In a traditional setting, the patients' beds are arranged with the head of the bed against an outside wall and the bed facing into the ward. If there is a window next to the patient that provides a view of trees or hills outside, it is often the case that the patient's visitors have a better view of it than the patient themselves does. Designing patient areas so that the natural world can be seen and experienced can make a big difference. Indoor and outdoor gardens, large glass panels that provide views, and the use of natural materials such as stone and wood are design decisions that have effects on health. The use of natural ventilation and open spaces also helps, since air-conditioning systems in hospitals can often spread infection by transporting viruses and bacteria around the building.

A healthcare building that shows the effect of this way of thinking is the Caritas psychiatric clinic near Ghent, in Belgium. This large building was once part of a hospital complex in green surroundings, but it was in very poor condition and demolition had already begun when the decision was taken to try to save it. The architects commissioned to rescue the building decided to work with the condition of the building instead of against it. They built glass spaces within the building and created an open-space garden on the ground floor, inside the building. They left many of the rough brick walls exposed and left the roof open to the weather. When it rains, the rain enters the building through the open roof and reaches the trees and plants at the bottom, while the people inside the building are sheltered from the weather inside the glass spaces. The whole space connects the inside with the outside, the man-made with the natural. Similarly situated, in the UK, Hong Kong, and Japan, there are now facilities called Maggie's Centres, run by a charity. These are spaces where people with cancer and their relatives can drop in to talk, access information, and share their concerns. They do not offer medical care, although they are usually located close to hospitals.

Another example of how design can influence health care comes from the US. It has been shown that design can change the treatment that patients receive. In 2015, researchers looked at the design of healthcare facilities and compared it to the number of babies being delivered via Caesarean section taking place in each building.

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They found that clinics with more operating rooms and fewer delivery rooms tended to perform more Caesarean deliveries. By reducing the number of Caesarean deliveries, it is possible to also reduce the number of mothers with surgical complications. Redesigning the clinics so that there are more delivery rooms may be a simple way to solve a healthcare problem through architectural design.

New types of healthcare buildings are opening up with a focus on the patient's well-being and which provide a relaxing environment, often involving gardens or other natural features, to support the whole person and their health. It's a long way from the traditional line of beds of sick people, but the architecture of hospitals and care facilities is heading in the right direction for promoting good and long-lasting physical and mental health.

Caesarean delivery (n): a method of giving birth that involves operating on the mother

sterile (adj): completely clean and free of bacteria, etc.

surgical complications (n pl): problems a patient has after having an operation

Vocabulary

Match the words from the box to their definitions.

1. a room for patients in a hospital _____
2. a group of buildings together _____
3. the final result of a process, such as healthcare _____
4. a person's immediate environment _____
5. the process of getting a disease _____

- complex
- infection
- outcome
- surroundings
- ward

Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

1. The way hospitals have traditionally been designed **benefits doctors more than patients / creates extra work for nurses.**
2. The way a patient's bed faces can mean that they don't **get the right treatment at the right time / benefit from any pleasant views available.**
3. The architects who restored the Caritas psychiatric clinic chose to **change the function of the building / accept the state of the building.**
4. Maggie's Centres are seen as a **replacement for / way of supporting people through** hospital-based cancer treatment.
5. It may be possible to reduce unnecessary Caesarean deliveries by **changing the balance of facilities available to pregnant women / designing larger clinics that can care for more women.**

Thinking

How do the buildings you use affect your mood? Do they affect you in positive or negative ways? Why do you think that is?