



Rethinking Details

How to Stretch Your Hospital Design Budget

Medical advances and shifts in government policy mean the facilities we design today must survive many changes. But we need to keep smaller changes in mind, too. These can add up to either big savings or big costs, depending upon the level of consideration we give them in the design process.

Discussions with more than 550 healthcare professionals reveal that a positive patient experience and good infection prevention are two of the most important patient room design goals. These are also the areas where details most matter.

Preparing for changes

A detail often overlooked in a patient room is soiled linen. It's not unusual for a beautiful patient room design to have a less-than-attractive solution for dirty laundry. One option is to hide the receptacle behind a door in a cabinet, but this requires extra steps for the caregiver.

The same can happen with exposed gloves and sharps receptacles. Organizing gloves by size and or type can help and concealing them in a cabinet can be a good option. The institutional sharps container may be mounted to a tool rail so its location can be changed with minimal disruption to the room.

Hand sanitizer brands and vendors can change frequently, which means replacing the old dispensers. This requires repairs to the drywall and touching up the paint, typically not considered in the initial decision. Similarly, research uncovers that

many automatic/touchless paper towel dispensers in patient rooms needed to be removed, due to the noise they generate. Any cost savings were eliminated by the cost of changing dispensers.

Asking these questions early on can solve some problems before they occur:

- What is the preferred process for handling soiled linen?
- Who empties the hamper and how often?
- Can the hamper and paper towel dispenser be hidden?
- How frequently will towel and soap dispensers be changed?
- How often do glove boxes and sharps receptacles have to be changed?
- Would the initial cost of a wall-mounted tool rail for nondestructive changes be less than ongoing wall repairs?

Small solutions for greater infection prevention

How a hospital applies infection prevention measures to its patient rooms can have a big impact on design choices. In our research on hand washing, we focused on the sink and faucet design of the caregiver hand-washing station.

If the primary purpose of the sink is hand-washing, then temperature control

might not be required. A touchless faucet that mixes hot and cold water to a selected temperature may be a good choice. But surprisingly, concerns about sensors have trumped the infection control advantages of not having dirty hands touch the handle. New technologies to improve sensor performance continue to deliver better results.

If the care process requires hot water from a faucet, the water temperature needs to be controlled with foot pedals or wrist blade handles. Foot pedals allow for temperature control and are touchless, but they can be difficult to clean.

Here are some infection control questions to be asked when designing a patient room:

- Has your infection prevention professional been sufficiently engaged in the design details?
- Which faucet type matches the use—wrist blade handles, foot pedals, or sensors?
- Will the automatic faucet operate on batteries, power, or emergency power? And if you choose a battery-operated faucet, has a preventive maintenance plan been put in place?
- Do the size, shape, location, and operation of the sink and faucet help prevent the spread of infection?

In the end, it always pays to sweat the small stuff. What other small details in healthcare design do you feel can help hospitals and other medical facilities keep up with changes?