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## IN DEPTH: CONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN

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### Health Care

## Planning for all future uses key to upgrading facilities

Douglas Scholl

More than ever before, health-care professionals are challenged with creating and maintaining medical facilities that respond to current requirements, yet can efficiently adapt to tomorrow's facility needs.

Changing technology and the trend toward specialized care require facility planners and health-care providers to not only meet short-term goals, but also to look comprehensively at their facilities' long-term goals, taking into account community needs, staffing and technology. Further, the medical community is increasingly cognizant of the impact efficient and effective facility design can have on operational costs.

### Beyond bricks and mortar

Recognizing these factors as a necessity to compete, it is crucial for today's architects to go beyond providing traditional bricks and mortar.

Design and construction professionals should serve as another member of the business team assembled to map out long-term health-care planning.

Typically, the result of this collaboration is a master plan that will serve the health-care organization today and provide a solid means to adapt for tomorrow's needs.

Master plans let health-care professionals identify what impact individual projects have on each other, as well as uncover opportunities and limitations within existing facilities.

For example, if a project requires an upgrade to a facility's electrical service, it's better to review the project in a larger context to ensure the modification will accommodate future renovations.

Choosing to build a new facility or renovate an existing structure is a challenging endeavor. With increasing pressures to streamline costs and manage with tighter budget constraints, it is important to look at all options before launching a construction project.

Unfortunately, the necessary planning process is often disregarded because of immediate needs, such as making room for new equipment or the addition of new patient services. However, such reactive design creates challenges almost immediately in terms of usability and effectiveness.

For example, the addition of a new surgical suite may solve scheduling problems, but it will impact adjacent patient care areas, create additional equipment requirements, and affect staffing levels and associated support spaces, such as pre-operation and post-operation facilities.

Without proper planning, the new suite may cause these associated spaces to function poorly.

### The right team

The first step toward a successful renovation or new construction project is a feasibility study, where health-care

goals. Assembling the right team is critical.

While the architect focuses on wide-ranging aspects of the construction project, such as code compliance and mechanical systems, the interior design professional focuses on the details of the space, such as staff work flow and the location of furniture and fixtures, ensuring a more efficient layout.

During this process, the design team analyzes factors such as space requirements, existing building capabilities, operational efficiencies, patient flows and technologies.

Collaborating with the owner, the design team begins by interviewing key staff members and patients. This enables the team to thoroughly understand the facility's inner workings, needs and the impact the project will have on it, physically and financially.

In addition, the staff begins reviewing operational, business, and marketing objectives.

By participating in conversations regarding how they operate and function, feasibility studies often help streamline procedures, resulting in efficiencies beyond those created by the construction.

Regardless of the type of project a health care organization is pursuing, planning is essential to long-term success.

Those thriving in today's healthcare industry are responding to the marketplace with expanded and new facilities that meet the needs of patients today and in the future.

By thinking beyond the bricks and mortar to patient convenience, operational issues and the community served, facilities are likely to last longer and allow healthcare professionals to better adhere to their corporate vision.

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