

Designing a Competitive Edge for Physician Offices

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Today's patients and families are savvy, and health care competition is fierce. Practices must respond to market demands by embracing design considerations that contribute to achieving operational efficiencies and quality patient care.

The optimum time to examine operational processes and patient care delivery methods is prior to embarking on a new medical office building project or leased medical space. The careful evaluation of how staff and patients use the existing space can be incorporated into the programming and design of the new space.

The Practice Footprint. Operational efficiencies can be improved by adjusting the practice's footprint and integrating current technology. The first step in creating an efficient footprint includes early planning discussions with physicians and staff to create a snapshot of current layout and expectations for the future. Many practices analyze the staff workflow from how a patient is scheduled through the follow-up appointment. Taking an early assessment of the patient experience and the associated staff activities results in improved efficiencies among staff and patients.

Technology. Physician practices are demonstrating a true commitment to electronic medical records. All patient records are stored electronically and readily accessible by the click of a mouse. Precious real estate is no longer needed to house rows of filing cabinets.

Additionally, fewer computers are being used within practice walls. Doctors and staffs are using tablets (or notebooks) to chart patient information. Kiosks are integrated into waiting rooms to expedite the patient registration process. Large and

small advancements in technology allow practices to focus more time on their patients and less time on paperwork.

Patient Privacy. Privacy continues to be a major concern in practices. Proper sound control is addressed during design and implemented during construction. Sound insulation in walls and ceilings should be considered as well as sound-absorbing acoustical tile in exam and consultation rooms. High material costs can be a sticking point for some practices. Consider the options and determine the appropriate level of sound privacy within your practice.

Calming Effects. Today's trends in health care design are predicated on healing environments for patients. Many studies including the widely acclaimed Pebble Project demonstrate how environments of care can assist in patient healing. On the medical practice side, calming concepts are integrated into design to mitigate patient anxiety and stress. Water features, warm colors and natural light contribute to these ideals and can be incorporated even with modest budgets.

The Patient Experience. Physicians are seeing more family involvement in the exam rooms. Family members assist their loved ones by remembering important information and asking tough questions of the doctors. As a result, practices diagnosing more serious illnesses are increasing exam room sizes to accommodate family participation.

Practices also consider many other design concepts to improve the overall patient experience. They include covered drop-offs at main entrances, digital imagery, comfortable waiting spaces and more.

Green Design. Physician practices are embracing sustainable choices for their practices by selecting non-PVC products, products with postconsumer recycled content, low-VOC paints and energy-efficient lighting. These kinds of products minimally impact the project budget, have a lengthy shelf life and contribute to a cleaner environment.

A Competitive Edge. Operational efficiencies can be improved by adjusting the practice's footprint and integrating current technology, while patient care can be enhanced through design by offering comfortable and calming interior environments. Successfully balanced, these considerations can make a significant improvement in the design of your practice.

Andrews Architects approaches health care design with a refreshing, real-world perspective. Andrews Architects' approach helps health care clients be more profitable and integrate thoughtful design considerations into patient care areas. The firm's health care studio provides full-service planning, architecture and interior design services. In the past three years, the firm has planned and designed over 500,000 square feet in freestanding medical office buildings and physician suites ranging from oncology, cardiology, orthopaedics and family practice. ■

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