

Body **AND** Soul

Advances in clinical design put patients—and their caregivers—first



By Jennifer Sergent

Above

The patient rooms at Memorial Sloan Kettering Josie Robertson Surgery Center are designed with hospitality features such as a paneled wall of built-in storage and huge picture windows; the medical equipment is disguised or minimized. Copyright Chris Cooper / Courtesy Perkins Eastman

The Healthcare practice leaders at Perkins Eastman agree that the medical industry’s latest technological innovations shouldn’t be driving the design in a clinical environment. Their guiding light, rather, is a concept that prioritizes the well-being of the people who populate it. “It’s not necessarily a hospital setting. It’s a setting for human beings,” says Erich Burkhart, the managing principal in San Francisco who led the Healthcare design team for the award-winning Stanford Hospital.



Naturally, the firm's latest designs make buildings highly adaptable to change in treatment and technology. Plans for an expanded emergency department at PIH Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, for example, separate it into pods where infectious-disease patients can be kept separate from the general population. Openings in the curtain-wall envelope at the David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York allow huge pieces of equipment to be moved in and out. A ceiling hatch is going into the new cancer center at Washington University in St. Louis so its huge MRI magnets can be replaced every decade. And Stanford Hospital's parking garage can be transformed into a triage area during a pandemic, while the hospital itself is highly modular, with movable walls to make way for machines that don't yet exist.

Yet ask any principal what they hold most dear as they're programming anything from a community clinic to a huge new teaching hospital, and their answers focus back on the human experience. Think of a frantic parent whose child is in surgery, says Mary-Jean Eastman, Perkin's Eastman's co-founder and vice chair. "You're in a lot of stress. These things are difficult for people, so we have to understand that."

Nature's Course

A successful design to counteract stress can be as simple as a well-placed view—a situation Burkhart experienced as a patient himself. Last summer during a hospital stay following surgery, he couldn't see out his room's high window. It wasn't until his last day when he got up for discharge that he could see through it, he

says. "I had this fabulous view out over the whole city, with the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz and the harbor. I was in bed for five days before I even realized that I had a view!"

That yearning for views and nature came across even more powerfully when Burkhart's team was planning Stanford Hospital's design. One of the university's trustees, whose young son was dying of a terminal disease at the time, had a single request, "His son wanted to go outside," Burkhart says. "The boy wanted to go outside one last time, and [in the former hospital], there was no place to go. His dad said, 'I don't care about the surgeries. I don't care about emergency or radiology [treatments]. I want courtyards and gardens. I want families to be able to take their loved ones outside.'"

Seeing Eye to Eye

A new patient-doctor dynamic informs other advances in healthcare design. Patients are consumers now; they see doctors and caregivers as team members rather than authority figures. From an architectural point of view, that means breaking down the barriers between the two—no more tall reception banks; no more waiting rooms that feel like holding pens; and no more networks of small spaces that keep patients moving from room to room.

Design should reflect these new values, where the patient needs to feel like they're cared about, and staff needs to recognize that their time is valuable. It all starts before they walk through the door. Online pre-registration allows the staff to extend a warm greeting—

Above

An infusion lounge at the David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center is intended to resemble a private lounge, rather than the more typical hospital infusion areas that have assembly-line like rows of patient seats with little to no privacy. Copyright Chris Cooper / Courtesy Perkins Eastman



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Indoor solariums and outdoor courtyards and gardens such as this rooftop garden at Stanford Hospital are integral to the healing experience in Perkins Eastman's designs for healthcare environments. Copyright Brad Feinknopf / Courtesy Perkins Eastman

instead of copious forms—when the patient arrives. Rather than queuing up at a reception desk, a concierge comes to you with a tablet to confirm information. Apps can text patients as they walk throughout the building and grounds so they don't have to sit in one place to wait for their name to be called. Exam rooms are also bigger to accommodate a larger care team. When Associate Principal Rachel Birnboim and her team were designing the nationally recognized New York Health and Hospitals/Gotham Health COVID-19 Centers of Excellence in New York's outer boroughs last year, they wanted to ensure that these rooms could serve multiple functions. "It's a one-stop shop" for exams, procedures, and medical consultations, she says. "It's all about catering to the patient."

Another big part of that goal is designing interiors that aren't overtly medical. Principal Maureen Carley-Vallejo, the firm's healthcare interiors lead, is always looking to reduce "clinical clutter." At hospitals such as Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center's Josie Robertson Surgery Center, built-in millwork hides things such as exam-glove boxes and hazardous-waste containers, so a patient room looks more like a hotel suite. Carley and her team have also pushed the design industry over the past two decades to create treated, medical-grade fabrics and carpeting with pleasing patterns and textures that feel more residential than institutional. With all the high stakes people are experiencing in hospitals and clinics, she says, "good design can definitely make it a much more manageable experience."

Staff Retreat

Hospital staff deserve the same care and consideration as patients and their families, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which hospitals have been overrun for nearly two years, causing massive burnout and post-traumatic stress among medical professionals at all levels. If the staff is well cared for, Principal Joanne Violanti says, they can in turn provide better care to their patients. Great working conditions also become a recruiting tool, which is crucial now that healthcare workers are in such high demand. The Memorial Sloan Kettering Josie Robertson Surgery Center, for example, has a staff-only rooftop destination lounge—a penthouse-like setting with a broad outdoor terrace and incomparable views. "There's a build-it-and-they-will-come aspect to some of these buildings," says Principal Jeff Brand, Perkins Eastman's Healthcare practice leader. "If you do it right, you're going to attract the best talent—and retain them."

Working environments are also evolving, where clinical designs are moving away from separate doctors' offices and toward more meeting rooms and collaborative areas. That allows medical experts from different disciplines to share ideas, which is especially important in places like the COVID-19 Centers of Excellence, Birnboim says, where COVID survivors who are suffering from multiple long-term afflictions require a holistic approach to their treatment. In space-planning terms, the consolidation of staffing space frees up other areas for new uses. Burkhart is seeing these opportunities occur at teaching hospitals

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such as the University of California at San Francisco, where scientists and researchers with knowledge of artificial intelligence and genomics work with doctors to translate that science into new, cutting-edge medical treatments. “What we find in our nursing units these days is space for these clinical research people and ancillary professionals who didn’t used to be there,” he says.

Poised for the Future

“We’re in the golden age of hospital design, because it’s so much better than it was 30 years ago, and getting better all the time,” Principal Jason Harper says. There’s much more beauty, for instance, that mitigates all the medical brawn. Patients, visitors, and staff at the David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center can gaze into a virtual koi pond or take an “art walk” around the center to help pass the time—a much-needed passive distraction. Printed abstract nature murals grace the walls of the imaging rooms to distract patients from the intimidating equipment. Within the Perkins Eastman tradition, Carley says, these gestures are rooted in art-focused design that started more than a decade ago with Memorial Sloan Kettering’s Evelyn H. Lauder Breast and Imaging Center, which is filled with

hundreds of works of fine art curated by Lauder’s own art consultants.

Even in community-hospital settings with much smaller budgets, the firm’s designers make every effort to enhance the experience. Sculptural lighting, high ceilings, and marble-like flooring at the COVID-19 Centers of Excellence channel a more hospitality-informed environment. Patients arriving at New York-Presbyterian’s Brooklyn Methodist Hospital Center for Community Health can leave their car with the valet before entering a soaring lobby filled with large-scale works of art.

“I don’t consider myself a healthcare architect anymore,” Brand says, because the term connotes designing for the apparatus of treatment rather than the patients themselves. “We all have stories. These are human stories, and we’re designing for all of those moments,” Brand explains, from the joy of birth to the shock of injury, the fear that comes from an unwelcome diagnosis or the mourning of a loved one’s death—and the endurance with which the staff witnesses this entire range every day. “It’s not about architecture. It’s about our response to people’s emotions.” **N**

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Left: This staff-only destination lounge at Memorial Sloan Kettering Josie Robertson Surgery Center is a huge appeal for hospital workers, from the top surgeon to the custodial staff, Mary-Jean Eastman says. It’s in a prime penthouse location, not some forgotten space in the basement. Copyright Chris Cooper / Courtesy Perkins Eastman

Right: After a hospital stay where he couldn’t see out his room’s high window, Principal Erich Burkhart ensured that the rooms at Stanford Hospital would afford patients broad, sweeping views that could uplift their spirits and encourage calm and healing. Copyright Brad Feinknopf / Courtesy Perkins Eastman

