

Turning Green into Gold Green Patient Room: Lessons in Selling Good Design and Product Value at IFMA World Workplace



by B. Alan Whitson, RPA

One of the most popular exhibits at IFMA World Workplace '07 in New Orleans was the **Green Patient Room**. For three days, this 400 sq.-ft. exhibit was packed with architects, interior designers, facility managers, reporters and TV film crews. This wasn't the first time the Green Patient Room played to large crowds. In May, it was the star of the green centerpiece at the **2007 Commercial Construction Show** in Chicago.

So what makes this exhibit so popular, since many of the products in the Green Patient Room were on display at other booths in the exhibit hall? The answer is simple: **Context**.

Good design goes beyond aesthetics; it must take into account factors such as

- ▶ constructability
- ▶ first-cost considerations
- ▶ life cycle costs
- ▶ the environment
- ▶ how it affects the people using the space.

A full size mockup can engage people, especially clients, like no other method. Every element in the space, no matter how small, can be seen in context with everything else and with the people using the space. The reality is that very few people can read and understand blue-

prints. While renderings can give you a sense of how a space will look, they never fully convey the feeling you get by actually being inside the space. No matter how hard you eye-ball a product it's difficult to understand how well it integrates with other elements in a facility.

You can see the power of context at any car dealership. Slip into the driver's seat, close the door, turn the key and begin the test drive, and everything about this automobile is in context. Is there enough headroom, is the dash laid out in a logical manner, is there wind noise when driving on the freeway, and how well does it handle. No brochure could ever tell these things you.

The Green Patient Room is not a patient room you will experience in a hospital; then again, many of its features are being incorporated into new hospital projects. It is a three-dimensional concept that allows architects, designers, facility manager, contractors, hospital administrators, doctors and nurses to see, touch and discuss the latest thinking in hospital design and operations in the context of a patient room.

As you walk through the Green Patient Room, you notice the strategically placed placards detailing why specific design concepts and products were used and the benefit provided. This was not a static display. Designers from the architectural firm, **Ashen+Allen**, were on-hand taking groups through the exhibit and demonstrating the how and why behind every design decision, large and small.

There are five zones in the Green Patient Room: family, terrace, patient, staff, and bathroom. The objective was three-fold:

- ▶ Demonstrate sustainable materials and technologies that are readily available and economically viable in a health-care setting
- ▶ Show how best practices and evidence-based design can improve the quality of care for patients, encourage



Overhead

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families to visit, help control operating costs, and reduce the stress for staff

► Create a focal point for discussing the issues and solutions affecting hospitals today

Studies reveal that families who visit frequently, stay longer and are involved in patient care help reduce healing times and improve patient wellbeing. The layout of the Green Patient Room encourages this. The design is similar to a living room with a television, sleeper sofa, workspace with internet access, and a wall unit with a bench and storage seats. The family zone allows family members to sleep over, work or be entertained while the patient is receiving treatments or sleeping.

Another popular discussion topic was the terrace. This private balcony offers several benefits to the patient, visitors and staff. Research shows that hospital patients with views to nature recover more quickly, experience less pain, and require fewer medications than patients require with no view to nature. If the patient's condition permits, they can be moved on to the balcony, which can improve morale by offering a change of scenery and a reprieve from the patient room. It also offers an area of respite for family members and visitors.

The Green Patient Room is about the details, big and small. A nightlight is not very sexy and an easy item to value-engineer out of a project. Yet, a well-placed nightlight can prevent somebody's grandmother from falling and breaking a hip while she is in the hospital. The nightlight



Patient Bed

selected uses an amber-colored LED so it will not disrupt the patient's circadian rhythm. The LED consumes only 6-watts of energy, and its life is measured in years, not hours. This nightlight does not scream "pick me," when scanning a product catalogue, but in the context of the Green Patient Room that little nightlight is very important. More than 25 manufacturers supplied products. Every product selected serves a purpose in context with every other element and is part of the overall sustainable, healing story.

Just as insightful as the tours were the conversations happening in and around the Green Patient Room, as architects, engineers and facility managers were discussing how this concept, detail or product could reduce cost of operating a hospital and improve the quality of patient care. Occasionally you could overhear a spirited discussion about merits of alternative ways of achieving the same goal, often followed by an exchange of business cards and plans to discuss the issue further.

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In addition to Anshen+Allen, the Green Patient Room was the brainchild of the **IFMA Healthcare Council, Healthcare Building Ideas**, and **Corporate Realty, Design & Management Institute**.

The big lesson from the Green Patient Room at World Workplace, whether you are involved in healthcare or not, was the insights on how designers and manufacturers can do a better job of communicating with clients and organizations they want as clients.

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Terrace



View of Family Area from Patient Bed



View of Patient from Family