



Wait in comfort

Waiting rooms follow the in-patient rooms as areas where patients and attendants spend most time

BY MANU MALHOTRA

1. The proposed waiting area and lobby zone at HCG NCHRI Hospital at Nagpur are highlighted by wall murals.

Healthcare spaces are becoming more and more patient centric and customer friendly. And one of the prominent areas of healthcare facilities which are prime points of public contact and access are waiting areas. Waiting areas in healthcare facilities earlier used to be similar to other public facilities; crowded and noisy, with an underlying character of chaos. For the contemporary healthcare provider, the waiting room is as much the 'face' of the facility as the entrance lobby or the exterior of the building. Waiting rooms follow the in-patient rooms as areas where patients and attendants spend most

time. They are now being upgraded to the same customer-patient-friendly standards as other areas.

The patient experience often begins before they enter the hospital facility itself. Mobile apps and online scheduling and appointments are the order of the day, with patients now being able to co-ordinate and plan their visits to the hospital to reduce waiting time. The touch of technology now extends to frontline staff, with the advent of handheld smart devices geared to co-ordinate patient inflow, admission and registration, patient histories, reports and feedback. Another new trend that is picking



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up is self-registration kiosks, similar to self-check-in kiosks at airports, especially in the OPD, where one might expect a certain percentage of patients undergoing long-term treatment and repeated visits to the facility.

Waiting areas in healthcare facilities can be divided into three primary types, based on use. Waiting areas for the emergency and surgical departments as well as waiting areas outside intensive and critical care areas can have attendants and visitors who are often emotionally charged and require soothing. Visitor areas in OPDs, entrance zones and such require a broader



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treatment with more respite in the form of commercial areas as well as connectivity and public interface. Long-term waiting areas such as waiting rooms for attendants of ICU patients or in-patient units in large facilities need to give comfort prime importance in order to avoid inconvenience to people who are already burdened with anxiety and are away from home.

Irrespective of use, providing connectivity to patients and attendants has become an unavoidable part of service. Wireless internet hotspots and charging stations for a range of PEDs from mobile phones to music players to laptops has become the rule rather than the norm, helping both patients and attendants to stay connected to the professional, as well as social fronts of their lives.

In areas such as waiting rooms for attendants of intensive care patients, these requirements need to be fulfilled at the individual level as the duration of stay of the attendants may be in terms of days rather than hours. Further, television plays

2. The proposed lounge seating in the waiting area at Medics International in Lucknow.

3. The waiting area at the at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute in Delhi.



an important part, as much for connecting with the outside world in the era of round-the-clock news service as it is to provide some form of respite in terms of entertainment. Hooked into the central information system, the same television screens can also double up as information providers and branding tools.

As music has a soothing effect on the human psyche, music systems are ubiquitous in most hospitals. However, they may be toned down or avoided altogether in waiting areas such as in emergency or surgery, where they may prove to be counter-productive. Comfort is also given increased prominence in the design of waiting areas. The type and layout of seating becomes an important factor. In the past, tandem seats or benches would serve as a standard, but now the use of tandem waiting is being limited to areas which have higher footfalls and less time spent by individuals. The use of lounge seating is gaining prominence, both in areas such as dermatology, dentistry and health-checkups, as well as areas peopled by attendants of patients undergoing long-term care such as chemotherapy or dialysis where healthcare providers need to pay extra attention to regular visitors.

Intensive care waiting rooms may have recliners or even individual beds or cubicles to serve the need and privacy of attendants. Comfort can also be induced by the right aesthetic language. Through the use of soothing and warm colours and materials, provision of ample daylight and the creation of green pockets or vistas, waiting

areas become soothing and more enlivened and less mundane.

Commercial areas in hospitals have long been a source of revenue generation, but are now being fine tuned to integrate into the facility, both in terms of use and branding. While the cafeteria or food kiosk will always be lucrative for hospitals along with the pharmacy, their locations are being attuned to waiting areas and attendants. Thus, 24 hour coffee shops accompany emergency areas and waiting areas for in-patient attendants, whereas food kiosks or larger restaurants may be a part of outpatient and day-care waiting areas.

Gift shops add value to the customer as well as patient experience, especially in maternity facilities or facilities addressing recuperative care. ATM machine and currency exchange or banking facilities ease financial hassles for visitors. Also, art installations also serve as an important branding tool while bringing a humane touch to the austere environment. These installations may be in the form of art galleries or stand-alone installations such as sculptures or murals.

The waiting areas like the in-patient departments of healthcare facilities are thus moving towards a more hospitable environment, where comfort is not just a luxury but an integral part of the overall healthcare service. **HR**

4. Waiting cubicles for attendant of ICU patients have been provided at Paras Hospital, Patna.



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