Shedding Light On Healthcare Lighting Design Strategies

May 31, 2016 by Barbara Horwitz-Bennett

With lighting equipment accounting for a good portion of a project’s FF&E costs, budget frequently drives healthcare lighting programs. At the same time, healthcare organizations realize that successful designs can pay off.

For example, proper lighting can potentially improve patient satisfaction surveys—and, subsequently, reimbursements tied to those surveys—by positively influencing patients’ perceptions of their environments. Beyond satisfaction, though, well-lit interiors can provide visually varied and stress-reducing spaces, shown by research to enhance patient outcomes and well-being. Overall, design experts agree that measuring the success of a lighting program should go well beyond aesthetics and function and focus on how the occupants are experiencing the light.

Getting comfortable

A big component of that experience is achieving a high level of patient comfort. Suggesting one approach, Jennifer Kenson, principal of healthcare interiors at Francis Cauffman (Philadelphia), recommends indirect or integrated architectural lighting to avoid the harsh effect created by direct downlighting. In addition, integrated bedside controls for dimmable light fixtures and window shades address an increased demand for patient control over personal lighting in the patient room.

For example, HOK recently collaborated with a lighting manufacturer to develop a bedside exam light with an integral LED reading lamp. The fixture is recessed in the ceiling at either side of the patient bed so no light shines in the patient’s eyes, eliminating the glare and discomfort of traditional fixtures. Additionally, “the lamp’s tight beam functions similarly to an airplane reading lamp and allows patients to read without disturbing sleeping family members within the room,” says Mark Banholzer, senior healthcare designer for HOK (Chicago).

More institutional lighting approaches of the past are also being replaced. “The style is to leave the clinical feel of corridors lined with fluorescent wraparound fixtures and move toward architecturally integrated LED fixtures that provide a soft, indirect light,” says Jonny Hoolko, a junior designer at Hiram Banks Lighting Design (San Francisco).

More institutional lighting approaches of the past are also being replaced. “The style is to leave the clinical feel of corridors lined with fluorescent wraparound fixtures and move toward architecturally integrated LED fixtures that provide a soft, indirect light,” says Jonny Hoolko, a junior designer at Hiram Banks Lighting Design (San Francisco).

For example, his strategy is to create comfortable spaces where the lighting isn’t perceivable by the user, which is achieved by hiding the light sources in architectural details—such as using linear recessed fixtures and other LED products that blend into the clean lines of a building without making the ceiling look busy. The result is soft, ambient lighting that accentuates the architecture rather than competes with it.

Similarly, Banholzer says HOK selects fixtures that don’t look like what you might expect in healthcare. “As long as we can achieve the required illuminance level and the fixture can be cleaned and maintained easily, we’re open to using nontraditional lighting options,” he says. For example, HOK’s typical lighting design approach is to minimize the visual impact created by fixtures so that
the light itself becomes the expression. “A combination of form, texture, and colored surfaces—washed or enhanced with light—creates a rich and varied visual environment,” he says.

To achieve an integrated feel, Kenson recommends coordinating the lighting design with the project’s architectural finish palettes and considering the design intent when selecting fixtures. For instance, a smaller-scale space might call for more decorative lighting fixtures to enhance a sense of intimacy, she says, while architecturally installed lighting could be more appropriate in a larger space.
Shedding Light On Healthcare Lighting Design Strategies

Which newsletters are you interested in?
- News
- Architecture
- Interior Design

Email*

First Name

Last Name

Company

Sign Up