

A SITE TO SEE

PIONEERING VIBRANT, INTEGRATED
COMMUNITY WELL-BEING
THROUGH LANDSCAPES

BSA

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*Pioneering vibrant,
integrated community
well-being through
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Over the past decade, the healthcare industry has experienced a sea of change that has prompted innovation. The time for pioneering innovation is overdue: Hospitals need to be completely reimagined from places people go when sick, to vibrant and well-integrated community centers of wellbeing. This means creating new levels of integration and interconnection with the existing landscape, community amenities and systems, and sustainable infrastructure and networks by thoroughly analyzing opportunities to connect beyond the boundaries of the hospital facility or campus.

These successful connections are wide-ranging, highly diverse, and can be as simple as pedestrian pathways that enhance walkability and social connection, or as complex as districts of shared sustainable infrastructure and/or sustainable energy networks. So, how does healthcare integrate and interconnect with its environment? And what are the rich and interesting possibilities of its role in city-making?

A new mindset for healthcare decision makers leads to a holistic way of thinking wherein communities are healthier to live in and wellness is seamlessly integrated into peoples' lives. This cultural shift is becoming increasingly urgent as statistics emerge comparing the significant investment Americans make in healthcare with outcomes that show longevity and quality of life in the range of third-world countries.

Here are considerations for healthcare leaders seeking to pioneer this innovation.

Interconnecting Structure to Landscape + Systems

Connecting to the landscape is fundamental to effective site design. Successful integration includes thinking about the existing systems that are running through the site, the existing topography, and how to connect the new structure into its landscape. The way buildings are situated on a site impacts sun and wind effects. De-



care facilities provide many jobs and programs to the community, which gives employees and their families a sense of ownership in the hospital and the community.

In one example of a natural environment, a previous developer had used 70' of fill on one side of a sloped site. Inspection of the site revealed the previous owner had installed a corrugated metal pipe to bury the start of a stream. The stream was a tributary of the Allegheny River in Pittsburgh, which is part of the Mississippi River system. The discovery that this tiny stream was connected to the largest watershed on the continent informed the attitude of the project team, who sought to restore the hydrology and topography of the original site. This is a paradigm shift for many leaders, who understandably don't often think beyond the boundaries of their site. Connection to something broader will inform the design for the site and potential for wellness

Interconnecting with Community + Sustainable Infrastructure

This systemic approach can also take different forms, such as transportation systems that emphasize walking and public transit or environmental systems that make ideal use of the surrounding landscape. Pedestrian paths

pending on the climate, designers may want to provide shelter from these elements or they may want to harness them to help impact the temperature for occupants and increase the energy efficiency of the building.

There are both macro and micro elements to this concept of incorporating the landscape into the project. On the micro scale, it can be as simple as blurring the line between indoor and outdoor spaces by bringing in connections with the outdoors wherever possible. Looking beyond site borders, tying into the existing landscape, and creating interconnected systems represents the macro side. At the macro level, it is key to examine how systems connect, and not to limit that analysis at the boundaries of the site itself. These systems could be part of the natural environment, such as a river, or even an urban environment, as the population increasingly shifts toward cities. Europeans have had success with hospitals in city centers, but this idea has been slow to catch on in the U.S. Placing hospitals in urban centers can have many benefits beyond mere convenience. Larger health-

ABOVE | *Connecting to the landscape is fundamental to effective design. Successful integration includes thinking about the existing systems that are running through the site, the existing topography, hydrology, transportation, and how to connect the new structure into its landscape*

BELOW | *Patient rooms that accentuate the use of natural day-light and provide views to the outside feel spacious and welcoming, even when they are designed with maximum efficiency.*





from the neighborhood tie into the hospital, and green spaces on the hospital grounds can function as additional parks in the proverbial concrete jungle.

Increasingly, hospitals provide community amenities—urban gardens, farmer’s markets, healthy eateries, architectural features and outdoor spaces— that are unique and have broad appeal, making them daytime destinations for people who don’t have a medical need. This vision of “city making” is rooted in its integration with the surrounding landscape. The hospital can provide meeting spaces for corporate events, showcase the work of local artists in a gallery space in public corridors, and even become the go-to place for the healthiest food in town – a center for wellbeing, health, and energy. The hospital is sometimes one of the largest and most prominent buildings in the community, and, in this way, the site connects with the social geography of the community as well as the physical topography.

In addition to being top employers and providing amenities to the community, large healthcare facilities can be leaders in sustainability, interconnecting pieces of sustainable infrastructure. With influence and resources, hospitals can spearhead efforts toward clean power generation that other buildings in the community can connect to, creating a district of interconnected buildings working together to form a sustainable system. Initiatives such as this enhance the idea that healthcare facilities are places of wellness—for patients, their families, the community, and the environment—not solely a place people go for treatment when they are sick.

An example of these concepts is a sports medicine facility in Denver, Colorado. A joint project among UCHHealth, the Steadman Hawkins clinic of Denver, and CU Sports Medicine, the facility rethinks – at many layers – what an outpatient clinic can be, and makes creative uses of the site and its unique adjacencies.

For instance, in a typical medical office building, parking is usually as close as possible. In this case, there is a 10,000-sf green space between the parking garage and the building, used for outdoor therapy, coaching, and sports performance training. Visitors to the site walk past this green space as they enter, and there are seating areas where they can observe the activities. This inviting outdoor space is on the south side of the building, with plenty of sun exposure and warmth, and features an outdoor patio with a coffee shop. The green space and the building are both visually connected to a golf course along the east side of the entire site, giving the perspective of extended green space for the facility.

To the west, the site is bordered by one of the busiest freeways in Denver. To counteract the traffic, the project team positioned the facility below the freeway, so vehicular circulation can view the playing fields as spectators at a sporting event, and can look beyond the field to the golf course and business park. Indoor and outdoor spaces are joined by large glass-paneled garage doors that can be opened in nice weather to extend the 16,000-sf sports performance area inside the facility. This allows visual and physical access to the outdoors, depending on the weather, and creates a seamless transition between the facility itself and the natural world outside, on the site and beyond.

Shifting to Wellness + Patient-Centered Approach

As campuses make the shift from being treatment venues to wellness centers, exciting opportunities abound to promote community wellness. Walking and biking trails connect the campus to the broader community and reduce the dependence on vehicles. As our culture becomes increasingly environmentally conscious and the focus shifts away from the automobile as the primary mode of transportation, mass transit systems are becoming more robust. Promoting sustainable shared transportation options and encouraging people to walk or bike to their destination fosters the idea of a well community by increasing physical activity, opportunities for social interaction, and enjoyment of nature, all of which contribute to well-being, ultimately resulting in better health. Promoting wellness also includes reducing stress, and hospital visits are often stressful for patients and families. Creating an environment that is comfortable and easy to navigate can help to reduce that inherent stress.

Human Sensory Appeal, “Way-knowing” + Clarity.

Once people enter the campus, it is important to continue the feeling of wellness by making it an appealing

ABOVE | *Natural daylight from windows creates a seamless transition between the facility and the natural world outside, on the site and beyond.*

RIGHT | *Successful connections are wide-ranging, highly diverse, and can be as simple as pedestrian pathways that enhance walkability and social connection.*



place to experience. Avoid confusing or disorienting layouts that require maps, and instead use natural wayfinding elements, such as courtyards, to reduce the number of directions required for people to find their destination. Creating a walkable, navigable journey within the facility reduces stress. The concept popularized by Julie Brand Zook, PhD, called the “economy of three turns,” is a good standard for way-knowing. After they take three turns, people are more likely to get lost and become frustrated, generating stress. Keeping a simple layout that is easy to navigate without excessive directions or maps enhances the patient experience and the appeal of the space.

Similarly appealing are patient rooms that accentuate the use of natural daylight and provide views to the outside. They feel spacious and welcoming, even when they are designed with maximum efficiency. Beyond views to nature, courtyards within the facility can give respite to occupants. One successful approach to harnessing the serenity of nature is to engage the five senses by bringing in textures and aromas that can make it feel more immersive. Calming water features and opportunities to view other species’ habitats—such as bird sanctuaries and beehives – are unexpected in a healthcare facility and give people a chance to expand perspective. Patients and families who have a positive experience will share good feelings about the building, and patient satisfaction numbers and HCAHP results, which dictate

reimbursements, will reflect that. Getting the desired results is all about providing a positive patient experience and a wellness-focused design is the key to achieving those results.

The New Town Center

As the healthcare industry changes, facility design will shift to integrate with the surrounding landscape, exercising influence over the community by promoting beneficial wellness and sustainability. Many communities throughout human history have been focused around a central building—cathedrals, government buildings, town squares.

The hospital can become the next iteration of that community focal point – the new town center – having a generative effect influencing a focus on health and wellness, driving pedestrian circulation and public transportation, organizing district-wide infrastructure and resources, forging social interaction, and offering new options for community recreation.

With the sense of urgency that accompanies a shift in the healthcare model, and the need to stay competitive, there is also great opportunity for leaders to look far beyond their site borders and pioneer vibrant well-integrated community wellbeing.

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