

# Healthcare Building Environments Impact Staff Satisfaction

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In healthcare settings, staff satisfaction and retention are critical to patient care and hospital outcomes. The current nursing shortage is a costly threat to healthcare delivery. Job satisfaction among hospital physicians and surgeons is also vital to achieving optimal healing environments.

Job satisfaction rates among healthcare personnel are strongly linked to working conditions, including the building environment (“Designing the 21st Century Hospital,” 2004). Building layout, temperature, lighting and noise, and Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) all contribute to the ability of medical personnel to perform their work well and to maintain high morale.

The healthcare industry faces the challenge of creating buildings that support the highest possible levels of healthcare delivery and staff satisfaction. This includes efficiently providing indoor comfort and proper IAQ.

### **Hospital nursing shortage continues to grow**

The U.S. healthcare sector is in the midst of a nursing shortage crisis. Hospitals everywhere are dealing with high turnover rates and diminishing interest in nursing as a career.

According to a report released by the American Hospital Association in April 2006, U.S. hospitals need approximately 118,000 RNs to fill vacant positions nationwide. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projects the nation's nursing shortage will grow to one million by the year 2020.

### **Staff shortages diminish patient outcomes and increase costs**

The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) reports that nursing shortages were a factor in 19 percent of medical errors resulting in deaths or serious injuries in hospitals (Tarken, 2004).

Nursing shortages also create a vicious cycle of stressed, demoralized staff unable to deliver proper care. Staff turnover adds to hospital costs for recruitment, hiring, personnel processing, orientation and training.

### **Building environments affect healthcare staff satisfaction**

Working conditions comprise a major factor in job satisfaction among RNs. This includes everything from working hours to salary. The building environment also plays an important role in how healthcare delivery personnel feel about their jobs. A healthy, productive, comfortable work atmosphere improves patient care, staff effectiveness and morale, which increases personnel retention.

## CREATING BETTER HEALTHCARE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

### **Temperature**

In healthcare environments, temperature control needs to be prioritized to promote patient health and healing. For example, in the operating room, temperatures need to suit the procedure being performed and materials used. At the same time, surgeons and support staff often need to concentrate for long hours wearing layers of protective clothing. Sub-optimal temperatures can lead to significant discomfort and perspiration.

Adding to the challenge, each hospital space has specific requirements. Patient rooms generally require warmer temperatures than surgical suites. Healthcare HVAC systems should be designed to allow precise temperature control throughout the facility.

### **Lighting and noise**

Lighting and noise also affect the hospital atmosphere. Poor lighting has been linked to patient depression and medication errors. Hospitals can incorporate technologies, such as highly efficient fluorescent lighting to achieve proper conditions for staff, while saving energy.

High noise levels also add to stress. Building equipment, including HVAC systems, should be selected and designed for minimal noise output.

### **Indoor Air Quality**

IAQ affects healthcare staff satisfaction in several ways. Poor IAQ contributes to high rates of nosocomial infections, which result in longer patient stays and higher work loads for already stressed staff. Hospital personnel also are at risk for contracting airborne infections, such as tuberculosis.

For proper IAQ, hospital ventilation and filtration systems must meet strict standards. Guidelines are set out by The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the Joint Commission on Accreditation for Healthcare (JCAHO)

Creating healthy, efficient, and comfortable hospital buildings is part of the solution for raising job satisfaction, lowering turnover among healthcare personnel, and improving patient outcomes.

## REFERENCES

- “Designing the 21st Century Hospital: Serving Patients and Staff.” Summary based on a conference convened by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and The Center for Health Design, June 3, 2004, in Washington, D.C.
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