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Courtesy of Artful Décor

Utilizing the Link between Pediatric Healthcare and Artwork

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While in the waiting room at a clinic, hospital, or dental center, children and parents may experience stress, anxiety, and nervousness. There may be toys, aquariums, books, and magazines to pass the time. Artwork that adorns the walls is also a critical component of the entire healthcare experience. Studies have shown there is a link between artwork in healthcare offices and patient experiences. This phenomenon is also evident in pediatric healthcare patients. To fully appreciate the effects artwork can have on a facility, it is necessary to understand the function of artwork, previous research and the involvement of all stakeholders during the design process.

Function of Artwork in Pediatrics

When art is selected for pediatric clinics, it is vital to remember that the pieces should assist with stress reduction for both patients and their families. Artwork and décor can be a distraction for

patients and family members; it can put them at ease while they wait for an appointment or diagnosis. Equally important is the professional image that the artwork portrays to clientele.

Too often, art at the health care clinic may be outdated pieces from the doctor's home or a collection of non-cohesive artwork. Sometimes it is an office manager who chooses artwork based upon his or her favorite artist. Or, the artwork for a children's clinic may be cartoon characters, simply based on the misconception that all children want to see their favorite characters on the walls.

Unfortunately, in many cases, there is not a great deal of thought surrounding artwork selection, as it is seen as a means to fill a bare office wall. Artwork for pediatric healthcare settings should be carefully and intentionally chosen; most importantly, it should ease tension and distract patients. According to several artwork experts, stress in children can negatively affect healing time and overall healthcare experience.

Pediatric artwork images need to be a distraction from the reason for the doctor appointment. For example, utilizing an artwork theme in a dental office that shows nothing but teeth reminds patients of the upcoming visit. It may even bring negativity and additional stress prior to the appointment. Anatomical posters and other informational pieces can be overdone. They may cause tension and worry for patients and their families.

Previous Research Explains Children's Artwork Choices

In a study that appeared in the summer 2009 issue of Health Environments Research and Design Journal, the authors found that children appear to have varying preferences of artwork based upon their ages. During the study, 64 children at the Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas, were surveyed about their artwork inclinations. The children were segmented into the following age categories: ages 5-6, ages 7-10 and ages 11-17. After reviewing various artwork pieces, the children ranked some art as making them feel much better than other art. A realistic nature image of two deer in a green field ranked as the highest image overall. Stylized colorful nature scenes were also chosen as desired artwork.

The age category of the children affected study results during the Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital study. For example, the older children were more likely to respond to artwork that elicited an emotional response or evaluation judgment. Younger children enjoyed viewing child-art that had been developed by other children. They were easily able to focus on one element that connected with their personalities. Other studies have shown children's ages do not affect artwork choices as greatly as was found in the Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital study. What is clear from all previous studies: artwork that is realistic, bright and that utilizes a natural setting is typically the artwork-of-choice for all age categories of pediatric patients.

The main clients in a pediatric setting are the children; however, adults are often the decision makers when choosing artwork for the office. Instead of deciding artwork by adult preference, it can be beneficial to review research which concentrates on what children enjoy as patients and customers. As studies have reported, children appear to enjoy bright colors, interesting thematic

approaches and nature content; these types of artwork are considered calming and stress-reducing.

Gather Input from Internal and External Professionals

Evidence-based design (EBD) is a growing trend in the healthcare industry. This method of designing interior spaces is based upon specific, researched and credible information. This research is then utilized to garner the best potential outcome possible. EBD encompasses more than just reviewing empirical data. In fact, EBD also includes reviewing pertinent literature, hypothesizing potential design solutions and reviewing result-based outcomes after design implementation.

The methodology of EBD includes factors that involve many decision makers in the healthcare facility. For example, an art consultant or interior designer would begin with a review of published materials, followed by interviews with appropriate staff members. Doctors, nurses and other clinic personnel know the patients, dynamics and culture of the facility; this information can be relayed to the art consultant. Finally, involving the consumers or patients and asking questions about art preference can lead to dramatic results.

As more and more organizations realize the effects of artwork and décor on patients' mental and physical states, there will be additional research and other information to use as evidence. Perhaps one of the most important results of EBD will be the opportunity to provide a warm, comforting and healing environment for patients and families. A fully developed system of educating personnel and investing in healing spaces could lead to higher patient satisfaction rates and improvements in other measurement areas.

Artwork and Décor Portray an Office Image

The image of a healthcare provider is affected by the complete office design; this includes color schemes, furniture, and artwork. When thoughtfulness is exemplified through design, the healthcare provider is perceived as being thoughtful as well. First impressions are critical for the parents and children who are entrusting the doctor with their healthcare needs.

By conducting research, gathering input from internal and external customers and placing the focus on the patients, a pediatric setting can become a powerful place for both parents and children. Artwork choices can assist with making the waiting areas and exam rooms a calming, soothing place for those who have the experience of being in a healthcare setting where aesthetics, design and artwork have been considered.

References: Nanda, U., Chanaud, C.M., Brown, L., Hart, R. & Hathorn, K. (2009). Pediatric art preferences: countering the "one-size-fits-all" approach. *Health Environments Research and Design Journal*.

About the author and Artful Decor



Stephanie Weber utilized her degree in Environment, Textiles, and Design, as well as her 20-year career as an art consultant to co-found Artful Décor in 2000. The corporate office and framing facility, located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, now includes Artful Décor Gallery. The gallery opened in 2009 at the famed Minneapolis Design Center at International Market Square.

Artful Décor's goal is to implement artful solutions that enhance clients' company image and branding. Whether collaborating on new construction or remodeling, the company has an extensive library of artwork, artist network and professionally trained Art Consultants and installers throughout the nation. Stephanie's concentration on art for healthcare stems from her desire to create healing environments for patients, families, and staff. She thinks that Evidence Based Design, a relatively new area of research, will solidify the position of artwork as part of the healing process. She also believes that consulting a professional before selecting artwork for a healthcare facility is well worth the investment in patients' healthcare experiences, facility branding, and higher employee satisfaction.

Visit www.artfuldecor.com for more information. You may contact Stephanie at contact@artfuldecor.com or (877) 278-3858.