Survey Reveals Hospital Design as Increasingly Consumer-Driven and High-Tech

With the healthcare industry trending toward the value-based, it's no wonder some hospitals are borrowing approaches from the hospitality industry when designing and renovating facilities. Bright, pleasant, airy, easily-navigable spaces are of keen interest to some hospital boards…and often, spaces boasting of the latest technology, too. According to a survey conducted by Modern Healthcare (the 2018 Construction and Design Survey), the professionals contracted to design or revise hospitals are often asked to translate that vision into bricks-and-mortar (and computer chips, too).

More than one-third of the 120 contracting, design, development and architecture firms surveyed said they had noticed modest bumps in the revenue they earned through working in the healthcare industry (between no increase and up to 30%). Around 18% of the respondents reported stasis in that area up to a 30% decrease in demand, while over a third of the organizations experienced growth of more than 30%. The lowest percentage (16%) of firms surveyed said their work in the healthcare field dropped by more than 30%.

The challenge of relying on rapidly-changing technology

St. Louis-based BJC HealthCare, for example, operates a children's hospital (affiliated with the Washington University School of Medicine) that provides lush rooftop gardens for patients to enjoy. In addition, the children's hospital as well as BJC's Barnes Jewish Hospital include rooms where the patients see pictures of treating clinicians as they walk in. Patients can also order meals via that same TV and view educational videos regarding their treatment.

"One of the challenges when designing in healthcare is that by the time something gets built, everything gets changed," Donna Ware, executive director of planning and design at BJC, told Modern Healthcare. "We piloted new technology in existing nursing units to test and refine tools that add the most value and do so in a way that would be as painless as possible with our staff."

"An exciting time"

Andrew Quirk is senior vice president and national director of the Skanska USA Healthcare Center of Excellence, a company that has seen its annual total dollar volume increased by 5% over recent years. Quirk told Modern Healthcare that he sees providers contracting with builders when it comes to necessities in their operations. "Now, technology is in a much greater way informing what the architecture will be," he said. "We got rid of function follows form. Operators are keenly attuned to the efficiencies of buildings they design and how they operate."

Quirk also expressed his belief that new technology is steering providers in directions they might not have gone otherwise. For instance, one of Skanska's client facilities has patient rooms equipped with sensors that notify staff in the event of a patient falling or out of bed when they shouldn't be. Another one of their hospital clients has ID tags on employee badges that monitor the frequency and duration of caregivers' hand washings. And Skanska itself is utilizing a virtual reality platform in order to offer clients "walk-throughs" of their projects-in-progress.

Quirk added: "It's an exciting time. The designs and products are starting to listen and adapt to today's technology."

Some companies see providers as wary of

spending big bucks on high-tech

While some providers are investing in the physical space of their facilities, others have appeared to have been made skittish by the political climate of the past two years. Pepper Construction Group, one of the survey participants, had this to say: “Healthcare clients are still facing a lot of uncertainty, reimbursement is changing and decreasing, and the model of care is being forced to accommodate these changes. As a result, clients tend to be focused on smaller projects, more renovations and outreach projects in their communities that are not on main campuses.” Pepper experienced a decline of total dollar volume of 65% from 2016 to 2017.

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