



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To acquire insight into end-user experiences with therapeutic gardens in children's hospitals and compare these experiences with existing literature.

Healing gardens in children's hospitals: Reflections on benefits, preferences, and design from visitors' books

Reeve, A., Nieberler-Walker, K., & Desha, C. 2017 | *Urban Forestry & Greening*. Volume 26, Pages 48-56

Key Concepts/Context

Numerous previous studies have shown that gardens can provide healing and therapeutic benefits to patients. But lack of funding and space often impede the development of gardens in healthcare environments, as well as a lack of studies that focus on patient well-being after discharge. In order for stakeholders to justify the design and construction of therapeutic gardens, empirical evidence is needed to portray their positive effects on patient health. There is also a need to further explore the effects of these gardens on younger inpatients.

Methods

Focusing on the design of healing gardens in children's hospitals, the authors of this study performed a literature analysis and compared their findings with comments left by garden users from four different gardens belonging to one healthcare facility. These comments were left in "Bench Diaries" that posed questions to patients such as "Why are you here?", "How are you feeling?", "What do you enjoy?" and "Tell me what is on your mind." Responses to these questions were transcribed and organized into themes for further analysis.

Findings

The four most frequently observed themes derived from the Bench Diaries were: 1) seeking "time out" from the hospital experience, 2) a desire for immersion in nature, 3) fresh air, and 4) the garden's ability to provide a restorative experience. Generally, the comments gleaned from the diaries were overwhelmingly positive; the presence of the gardens appeared to have a noticeable effect on patient well-being, as was indicated by studies analyzed during the literature review.



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Limitations

This study takes place at one hospital that is uniquely outfitted with multiple gardens, each with a specific theme intended to promote user well-being. This context may have influenced user responses. Additionally, no quantitative data were gathered concerning patient health; all indications of patient well-being were taken from qualitative data. Lastly, researchers were unable to tell who authored the comments in the Bench Diaries; staff or visitors may have written the comments.

Design Implications

There is a large body of research supporting the idea that gardens hold massive therapeutic potential for everyone within a given healthcare environment. The findings of this study further indicate that the presence of healing gardens creates a positive experience for patients, staff, and visitors alike. Gardens should ideally be designed with multiple purposes in mind, including relaxation, physical activity, and general socializing.

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