

TAKEAWAYS



DESIGN FOR AGING:

Acute Care Environments

An Executive Summary on the Impact of Aging Populations on Healthcare Environments

INSIDE YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

Reasons why traditional acute care fails to meet the needs of older adults.

Acute care risks that contribute to poor outcomes among older adults.

Design strategies for supportive acute care environments.

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Design for Aging: Acute Care Environments

The Consequences of Acute Care Environments for the Aging Population

In 2010, 38.7% of all people discharged from short-stay hospitals were age 65 or older (National Center for Health Statistics, 2010). The traditional acute care model focuses on the treatment and diagnosis of disease. The resulting environmental design reflects the needs of clinicians to efficiently utilize appropriate medical technologies, equipment, and protocols. However, many older adults present to acute care settings with a number of chronic conditions and functional limitations, in addition to their acute symptoms (Parke, 2007).

The acute care setting is often insufficiently organized to provide the kind of comprehensive, supportive care older adults need. Consequently, hospitalized older adults frequently experience a decline in functional abilities upon discharge. Falls, hospital-acquired delirium, and loss of independence all contribute to poor outcomes among older adults.

Several acute care risks and potential design strategies are highlighted in the table below.

Acute Care Risks	Potential Design Strategies
Falls	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Most frequent and serious adverse patient safety event reported in hospitals o Costly for both patients and hospitals o Occur frequently during unassisted transfers to and from bed and toilet o More research is needed to identify specific design strategies that reduce falls (Ulrich et al., 2008) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Slip-resistant floors 2) Hand rails along wall to toilet 3) Night lights in bathroom and en route to bathroom 4) Wide doorways that accommodate mobility aids 5) Lower bed frames 6) Bed alarms



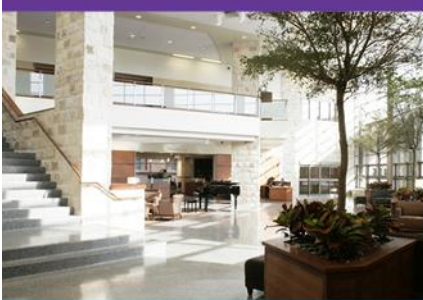
Acute Care Risks	Potential Design Strategies
Hospital-Acquired Delirium	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Temporary, severe confusion and disorientation associated with acute care hospitalization ○ Most commonly affects older adults ○ Symptoms include poor attention, disorientation, impaired cognition, hallucinations, aggression, and lethargy ○ Multifactorial causes (e.g., surgery, infection, pain medications, sedatives, dehydration, poor nutrition) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Space for familiar personal objects 2) Family space for visiting within and near patient room 3) Bedside access to hearing aids and glasses to optimize sensory function 4) Access to daylight to regulate diurnal rhythm and improve sleep 5) Memory cues to support orientation (e.g., calendar, clock) 6) Noise reduction
Loss of Independence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inability to perform activities of self-care ○ Older adults may experience a loss of muscle tone and strength from inactivity during hospitalization ○ Falls can also cause a reduction in functional ability and increased length of stay 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Space and opportunities for daily exercise 2) Facilitate independent functioning (e.g., use of toilet instead of bedpan, meals taken out of bed)

Focused attention on quality lighting, noise reduction, simple wayfinding, appropriate furnishings, and well-chosen finishes are design strategies found in residential care environments that can also improve acute care environments for older adults.

Design Implications Found in Residential Care Environments

Many of the design strategies recommended to support older adults in the residential care environment are also appropriate in acute care settings. Focused attention on quality lighting, noise reduction, simple wayfinding, appropriate furnishings, and well-chosen finishes are design strategies that can also improve acute care environments for older adults.

Acute care settings that successfully support the needs of older adults frequently employ additional staff with specialized training in geriatrics. Some emergency departments provide separate triage and treatment areas for older adults that decrease environmental stress typically experienced during an emergency visit.



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Helpful References

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