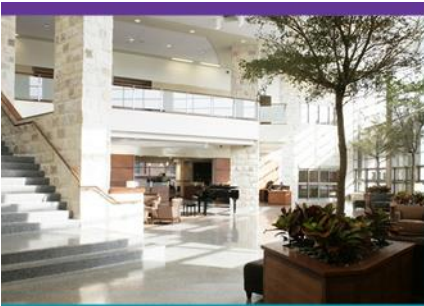




LESSONS LEARNED



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Lessons Learned about The Impact of Aging

The following are compiled from research literature, case studies, interviews, and other materials to provide an overview on the topic of aging populations.

1. As developments in modern medicine enable people to live longer, healthcare facilities are being challenged to find new ways to support the changing needs of a growing older population with the built environment.
2. While it's common for healthcare designs, policies, and services that support the older population to focus solely on disabilities and illness, some programs today are also finding creative ways to capitalize on their strengths. One example is allocating space in patient rooms to showcase personal items and photographs. This improves people's well-being and helps to create a bond with healthcare workers. It can also lead to higher patient and employee satisfaction ratings.
3. Some of the latest evidence-based design literature recommends taking a universal design approach to address the impact of aging. This means selecting design elements that work in a variety of settings and function appropriately for people with a wide range of needs and capabilities. In the hospital environment, this includes features such as non-skid flooring, support rails, low beds, easily accessible bathrooms, and extra space to accommodate families. Such designs benefit not only seniors, but people of all ages.
4. It's important that hospital designers think beyond patient rooms to create supportive common spaces so older people won't feel isolated. Some ways to accomplish this include offering welcoming areas for patients and families to socialize, designing easy-to-navigate corridors to get patients moving, using natural lighting to bring nature into the facility, and hanging colorful artwork or photographs that engage people and help them to feel less lonely.
5. Since aging patients often have complex healthcare needs, some health systems are designating emergency departments (EDs) that offer specialized care exclusively for senior citizens. These EDs often take steps to reduce noise and stimuli; provide beds with built-in scales, alarms, bed rails, and pressure-relieving mattresses to prevent bed sores; incorporate better lighting; locate labs and diagnostic services nearby; and make patients feel more comfortable overall.



6. Residential and long-term facilities can incorporate opportunities for people to age in place. One way to accomplish this is by creating flexible rooms that can be reconfigured for different medical equipment and services as people's needs change over time. This will help avoid the need for relocation as they age.
7. Increasingly, healthcare is extending beyond the confines of the facility setting to enable people to access services, support, and monitoring right from the comfort of their own homes. This is especially important as people age, and can be done most effectively in open layouts that are all on one floor, with wider doorways, lower light switches and cabinets, grab bars in the bathrooms, and remote monitoring and communication systems. Such design features enable people with reduced mobility to navigate more effectively and to connect with healthcare professionals as needed.
8. With any design project, it's important to get input at the earliest planning stages from the people who will use the space. Designers can use this information to understand the characteristics of patients and how they will see, hear, touch, and move through the setting. It's especially important for designers to consider the challenges and strengths of older patients in order to create a design that will work best for them.