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Patient Satisfaction from the Floors Up

By Mark McCabe

Hospitals across the nation are increasingly focused on patient satisfaction. This is a trend that has been growing in importance for



several years and many hospital designers and administrators now believe that the benefits of good hospital design extend far beyond just keeping patients happy and comfortable. Studies now indicate that good clinical design can also result in faster recovery times, lower infection rates, better nursing care, and less stress for all.

Recently, the Facilities Guidelines Institute and the American Institute of Architects have taken this a step further and have recommended that newly constructed hospitals provide more

single-patient rooms to increase patient satisfaction. Additionally, they recommend decentralizing nurse stations, putting greater emphasis on patient safety, and making hospital areas quieter. What they are really suggesting in many ways is designing patient rooms so that they look and feel more like comfortable hotel guest rooms than hospital room.

For these reasons, many medical facilities have installed carpeting in areas that were once traditionally covered with hard-surface flooring. In some situations, it has worked out well; in others, not as well. Building planners and hospital administrators discovered two core problems with carpet: it can be more challenging to keep clean compared to hard-surface flooring and it does not last nearly as long. In most commercial settings, including medical facilities, administrators can only hope that their carpets will last five to seven years before needing replacement. Many times, especially in high-traffic areas, they must be replaced in even less time.

As a result, hard-surface flooring continues to be the floor of choice among many medical facility managers. In fact, the

demand for VCT, terrazzo, resilient, and “architectural” finishes in public facilities has increased by about 15 percent in the past three years.



But to adequately maintain these floors and keep housekeeping costs down requires housekeeping professionals to have

an in-depth, ongoing training on floor maintenance. Not only do they learn the most advanced and productive floor maintenance techniques, but also they stay up to date on the latest trends and developments in floor cleaning technology.

This is especially necessary because floor maintenance is labor intensive and, as a result, costly. It is estimated that as much as 90 percent of the cost of maintaining a hard-surface floor is for labor, making this one of the few drawbacks of installing hard-surface flooring. But these costs can be minimized with skilled and well-trained cleaning workers using highly productive, time-reducing floor-care equipment.

Developing Floor-Care Skills

The best approach when training cleaning workers on floor maintenance is through hands-on demonstrations. First, the trainer must review with workers the importance of effective floor care—including the simplest of procedures, such as how to maintain floors on a daily basis by dust/damp mopping or vacuuming, and, in time, more complicated floor-care tasks, such as how to strip, clean, and refinish a floor.

Once these instructions are complete, the next step is detailing the intricacies and components of effective floor maintenance. It is also important to address—and end—old, ineffective floor maintenance habits the cleaning worker may have learned. As a result of modern hard-surface floors, equipment, chemicals, and technologies, the way floor care is performed today is not necessarily the way it was done ten or fifteen years ago.

After these steps of the training program, the worker can start performing the actual floor-care work. This is not a one-time procedure and may require working with cleaning crews

several times over many weeks to ensure the tasks are performed as trained.

The final component can be considered the test. This is when the cleaning technician is evaluated on the floor maintenance duties he or she performed. And, as with all tests, this is an opportunity to see what skills have been learned and which practices may need more training and attention.

Cost-Saving Equipment Selection

Overall, some of today's floor-care equipment is much simpler and easier to use and repair, and downtime is becoming less frequent. This is because some manufacturers are now making equipment with easy access to batteries, tanks, and motors, which allows many repairs to be made by the hospital facility's cleaning professionals.

Additionally, floor machines are becoming "healthier," with shrouds and vacuum systems that help protect indoor air quality and the health of the cleaning worker as well as building occupants. Also, some machines, such as cylindrical brush equipment, use less water and chemical

compared to conventional machines, which makes them more environmentally friendly as well.

Most Green cleaning experts believe that whenever less chemical is necessary to perform a cleaning task it helps contribute to Green cleaning. And this is especially true because floor cleaning chemicals are among the harshest used in the professional cleaning industry. (See sidebar)

But one key reason why floor-care costs are high is that the wrong size floor machines are selected. Floor-care equipment should always be viewed as an *investment* and not an expense. “Sticker shock” when selecting floor-care equipment often causes both cleaning professionals and facility managers to select smaller, less expensive equipment or even turn to mops and buckets. Selecting the right size equipment such as autoscrubbers and walk-behind machines that comfortably fit a facility’s hallways, patient rooms, and other areas can dramatically cut the time necessary to perform most floor-care tasks, and the savings in labor can pay for these machines in a relatively short time, usually in just a few months.

Another way to reduce the expense to maintain floors is to consider different floor-care technologies, such as the cylindrical brush floor machines mentioned earlier. These machines have counterrotating brushes at each end of a square base. The brushes have four to six times greater contact pressure on the floor than a comparable rotary machine, and because the base is square, the machine can better line up against baseboards and corners than the more conventional, rounded rotary disk machine. This feature eliminates the need to clean hard-to-reach areas by hand—a labor savings that quickly becomes a major cost savings as well.

Cylindrical machines, which were originally only found in Europe, are now available in the United States. And, as is often the case with new products, other benefits have been discovered over time. One of the most significant benefits is that most workers report these machines are easier to use. Unlike rotary machines, which can be difficult to operate and usually require considerable training, cylindrical machines essentially “glide” over the floor surfaces. This helps improve worker productivity, reduce fatigue, and prevent injury, which also lowers labor costs.

The Prevention Component

One key part of effective floor care that often gets overlooked is prevention—taking steps to keep soil and contaminants out of the facility, which helps protect the floors as well as keep them cleaner. This is best accomplished by using high-performance matting systems inside and outside all major hospital entries.

For most facilities, this involves placing “scraper” mats outside hospital entrances. These mats, as the name implies, help scrape dirt and soil from footwear. These are followed by “wiper/scrapers,” usually found in the breezeway, the area between the two sets of doors at the facility entry. Inside the facility, wiper mats are placed to collect any remaining soils that have not been removed by the other mats in the system.

Hard-surface flooring should not be overlooked as a way to contribute to patient satisfaction. A well-maintained floor gives patients and their families confidence and reassurance at what is usually a very stressful time. It is one very

important sign of a properly and professionally run hospital, and nothing gives patients more satisfaction than that.

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Sidebar:

Selecting More Environmentally Friendly Floor-Care Chemicals

Although most Green cleaning chemicals are comparable in performance to their conventional counterparts, this is not always true with environmentally preferable floor-care chemicals, which is one reason that cleaning professionals should select the most environmentally friendly floor equipment possible. Very simply, some users find Green chemicals do not perform as well as the products they are meant to replace.

This is a problem for healthcare facilities that wish to incorporate Green cleaning systems because these

products, especially finishes and strippers, are powerful chemicals that can harm the environment. However, there are steps housekeeping professionals and administrators can take to at least reduce the impact of these products. These include:

Choose finishes that:

- Do not contain carcinogens or reproductive toxins
- Do not contain zinc or heavy metals
- Have less than 7 percent VOC (volatile organic chemicals)
- Contain no aqueous ammonia, ethylene glycol monomethyl ether (EGME), or ethylene glycol monoethyl ether (EGEE)
- Have a total phosphorus concentration less than 0.5%
- Use a compatible stripper that is also considered Green/safer

Choose strippers that:

- Do not contain 2-butoxy ethanol, other carcinogens, or reproductive toxins

- Contain VOCs less than 7% after dilution
- Have a pH of 11.5 or lower
- Have a flash point less than 150 degrees Fahrenheit
- Do not contain ammonia or MEA
- Have a total phosphorus concentration less than 0.5%