



Shaping THE FUTURE

USER-CENTERED RESEARCH AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HEALING ENVIRONMENT

An interview with Suzanne Phillips Pugh

Within the healthcare landscape, user-centered research is one way for the designer to understand and develop an empathy for the needs of the patient, caregiver (medical and hospital staff) and care partner (family/other). We spoke with Suzanne Pugh, healthcare market manager, Brayton International, whose knowledge of color psychology, space planning and concept and perception development are an integral part of improving the healthcare experience for everyone.



Suzanne Pugh is the Healthcare Market Manager for Brayton International, a Steelcase Inc. company internationally known for its award-winning furniture designs. Ms. Pugh seeks to support Brayton's mission to provide furniture solutions for the user-centered healthcare environment.

Since joining Brayton International, Ms. Pugh has been instrumental in identifying needs within the healthcare environment and supporting the launch of award-winning room applications including seating for obese patients.

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What is user-centered research?

Within the healthcare landscape, user-centered research is one way for the designer to understand and develop an empathy for the needs of the patient, caregiver (medical and hospital staff) and care partner (family/other). Through user-centered research design professionals methodically capture the patient journey, as well as the experiences of those that visit and work in healthcare environments. By documenting these experiences, opportunities for improvement and innovation are revealed.

User-centered research is built upon a foundation of evidence proven through observation, interviewing, listening, and assumption-testing techniques, and then categorizing the research as interactions

between the people, spaces, tasks, information and objects. On the people side, it's important to understand the behavior and communication that occurs between itinerant nurses and the patients they serve, or the personal conversations in public spaces between doctor and concerned care partners. We evaluate the ambient environment of healthcare spaces observing the interplay of light, color, texture, sound and aroma, as well as LEED's impact thereon. We delve into "tasking" in healthcare spaces, that may range from filling out patient paperwork to repetitive maintenance activities.

There is an inherent cost in research because it takes time, effort and resources. The value, however, is in the long-term benefit of improving the healthcare experience for all.

How does user-centered research impact the healthcare environment today?

Diane Stover, Vice-President of Marketing for Memorial Hospital in South Bend, Indiana, said to me recently that, "No one remembers a day or a date, but everyone remembers a moment." This statement changes the way I look at all things. Commitment to innovation, creativity and a concern for the user should be the objective for those creating good health designs. At Memorial Hospital, the employees provide all visitors with the "welcoming experience," which embraces concern, compassion and quality treatment. In the past patients entering a healthcare facility would feel anxiety and at the mercy of their physician. Healthcare is changing today due to the consumer's (patients) demand for choice. Hospitals and healthcare environments in general are focusing on the "brand image" and how to encourage community use of their care facilities. Creating an environment that supports healing and wellness alleviates anxiety and promotes immediate trust. Promoting hospitality by creating an almost hotel-like atmosphere with amenities very similar to those a guest would experience at a upper scale hotel is also being modeled across the country. Wayfinding amid carefully planned spatial zones is well established, providing a sense of confidence, instead of confusion, for first time



In well-designed healthcare environments it's important to understand the behavior and communication between nurses, doctors and the patients they serve.

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users. Furniture placement clearly defines areas for different activities. Now and in the future there will be furniture zones that will signal various functions and activities that may take place within the space. This will become helpful for those care partners that are spending hours waiting for patient results. There may be areas for wireless computer use aiding in the ability to keep up with one's work, sleep and rest zones that promote rest away from the crowds and in a more comfortable fashion instead of on the floor or misaligned in a chair. Conversational zones for more intimate conversation as well as children's zones and refreshment areas will also be a part of new healthcare spaces. Gone are the days of total perimeter seating and long, cold, mint green corridors.

Research and observation of work and use patterns is currently being

done by companies such as IDEO, Steelcase and Brayton International design and research professionals. According to Phyllis Goetz, National Healthcare Sales Manager for Steelcase, Inc. medical error is now responsible for over 98,000 U.S. deaths a year. Spatial functionality improves the medical professional's work-life experience. Today, the average nurse is 48 years old and walks miles a day during a shift. Understanding spatial and product effectiveness and providing functional workspace solutions is critical.

Another issue facing healthcare is the obesity epidemic. Until we begin to observe human interaction in public spaces, we are not fully aware of how enlarged body-types affect interior spaces and product design. Widths of doorways, furniture weight load requirements and scales to accommodate those larger

than 350 pounds, are all obesity issues impacting our industry today. Dignity is being lost for those larger-scaled people. For example, instead of having the ability to weigh a large patient in the office, physicians are sending



Bariatric Seating by Brayton was developed to address patients' needs by increasing comfort and wellness.

them to the local Feed and Seed Store or the nearest highway weigh station. Hospitals and medical professionals are beginning to change the way they look at the hospital landscape and provide solutions for all types of people. Hospitals and hospital systems such as Memorial, Mayo Clinic and Kaiser Permanente are all purchasing bariatric furniture.

Through user-research, we endeavor to problem-solve contemporary issues, while encouraging new explorations in product development and healthcare design. Cia Mooney, Director of Product Development, Brayton International, states that "designing for healthcare is a quiet revolution, where the user-triad of patient, caregiver and



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care partner is our primary research and design concern. We are one mirror, of many, reflecting the changing principles in healthcare design today.”

How does user-centered research ultimately lead to client and customer satisfaction?

Each hospital is a unique entity with its own culture, brand image and customer base. Few are national in scope and market penetration, but the rigorous application of user-research can begin to differentiate each institution within the market place. The end result is that understanding the needs of the user-triad will improve the quality of our healthcare experiences nationwide.

Leading architectural and design firms across the country, such as HDR in Omaha, Nebraska, depend on the most current research available, particularly in the healthcare design process. Aneetha McLellan, Project Designer at HDR recently said the following, “I am a big advocate of user-centered research, because as a designer I can only surmise what the end-user wants. Having the necessary research to substantiate a cause only helps in the long run and helps me make my case to the clients. Clients want to know the track record and research before they go investing into product that they are going to want to keep for the next ten years.”



What is the driving force behind research based, user-centered design?

The baby boom generation has assured us of a strong and long-lasting healthcare market. The “boomers” are selective consumers who have grown accustomed to quality and choice. No longer vanilla, healthcare today forces us to understand that what we do, our industry, can provide more than furniture solutions.

Through user-centered research, we can create new “moments” and spaces, where healthcare providers and the communities they serve find value in design.

I challenge you to imagine a paradigm shift. Think and observe, like a “user”. The challenges that you face may become easier to solve.

