

With the case for evidence-based design firmly taking root in the healthcare industry—where demonstrated improvements in clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction, among other results, are becoming benchmarks for success—it doesn't take much to realize that the typical, institutional hospital room is already obsolete. The tide in healthcare is turning, and the flexible hospital room centered around caregiving and patient comfort and control will be the environment in which people will choose to seek medical attention in the future.

It is no wonder then, that furnishings for healthcare facilities are reflecting this trend. But in the competitive field of medicine, talk is cheap. Products designed for the patient room must not only be beautiful and comfortable, they must also be functional, durable, intuitive and, of course, cleanable.

For these reasons, among others, the first order of business for Nurture by Steelcase was to spend time in healthcare facilities doing some observation before launching its award-winning Opus™ Overbed Table at NeoCon® this past June, according to Alan Rheault, director of product development for Nurture.

## BRINGING Design TO THE Bedside

Designed with patients, family and medical staff in mind, the Opus™ Overbed Table from Nurture by Steelcase offers simple, but thoughtful solutions to a critical component of patient room furniture.

"While studying the patient room, it became very obvious that the most important component of the room aside from the bed was the overbed table," explains Rheault. As a result, Nurture decided that the overbed table needed to be rethought in order for it to become a successful addition to the existing line of Opus furniture.

Nurture had practitioners in the field test its prototype table to ensure that it met the needs they identified during their observations and to prove to medical staff that the company was committed to considering the needs of the patient, care provider and other partners in care, as the company's mantra suggests.

"When we first started talking to architects and designers, we were getting grilled with questions to see if we really knew our stuff or if we were an office manufacturer trying to do healthcare," admits Rheault. "We really felt like we were going through a rite of passage. People appreciate that we're doing our homework."



• ABOVE Nurture products focus on three key groups: patients, caregivers and partners in care. Each group has distinct needs within the healthcare environment and Nurture meets these needs with creative solutions inspired by the unique interactions between these different groups and their work environment.

But the research the company had conducted during the years prior to its official launch in 2006 were only part of the equation in the development of the overbed table concept. As it turns out, some additional on-site research of a more personal nature provided

Alan Rheault is director of product development for Nurture by Steelcase, a company dedicated to developing research-driven, evidence-based solutions for the healthcare industry. Named to his current position in February 2005, Rheault leads Nurture's design, engineering and project management team.

Rheault has more than 10 years experience with Steelcase. From 2004-2005, he served as Steelcase's manager of design, architecture and technology. Prior to that, he was Steelcase's manager of design and custom solutions.

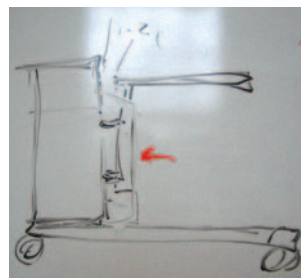
Under Rheault's leadership, Nurture and Steelcase have developed a number of highly innovative products, including the modular line of patient casegoods Opus™ (Best of NeoCon

Gold winner); the Verge stool; and the Opus Overbed Table (right).

Prior to working at Steelcase, Rheault was an industrial designer with several leading furniture and appliance companies. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial design from Western Michigan University in 1986, and a Master of Management degree from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI, in 2000.



Rheault lives in Grand Rapids and frequently serves as a design and product development expert for major industry publications.



## DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

**LEFT** A new peninsula-like table was developed to foster a team approach to consultations. Patients, caregivers and partners in care can gather around to discuss and review charts or computer images in a setting of equality.

**BELOW** Opus™ casegoods combine the convenience of traditional freestanding casegoods with the flexibility of modular furniture, and the durability to seamlessly integrate state-of-the-art technology and software.



some valuable insight into the table's final design.

Rheault's wife has worked in the medical field as a nurse for more than 20 years, and while she and her colleagues offered plenty of feedback, or "free consultancy," on the ideas he had been working on with Nurture, it wasn't until Rheault was hospitalized for vertigo that his eyes were opened to solutions to some of the design challenges in developing the Opus table.

"In that experience," he recalls, "I had nothing else to do but think about the overbed table and how to make it better." So through observation as a user, Rheault noticed that he tended to move the table until it banged into something. "It was a clue to me from a design standpoint to make sure that the table could handle getting banged into things without damaging it."

He also noticed that spills tended to occur as the table collided against the bed rail, for example, and as a result, cup holders were integrated into the design to prevent such accidents from happening.

Rheault also frequently found himself trying to pull the table closer to him, while at other times, the nurses or care providers were pulling the table away. To address this problem, the Opus table actually features two top surfaces: one stationary at standing height, ready for care providers, and the other a height-adjustable patient surface with non-handed concaved shape and soft corner radii for patient comfort.

"Another key thing Nurture has learned in our healthcare research over the last few years is that infection control is really a guiding force behind selection of furniture," notes Rheault, "so Nurture wanted to make a product that could handle repeated cleanings."

Rheault's initial thought for the Opus Overbed Table before being admitted into the hospital was to have a trim edge around the top of the table. "I thought it was a good solution because it could handle being bumped into things," he says. However, while in the hospital,

he found himself either picking at the trim on the table or noticed that the edge of the table was being trapped under the bed rail as it was being moved. More importantly, it was constantly being scrubbed down. "So if there is any opening in the seam, eventually moisture will get into it and separate the materials and cause problems with bacteria," explains Rheault.

Through these findings, Nurture designed the table to be highly durable by the use of appropriate plastics acting as bumpers, and edges that can't be picked at by restless patients. The table-top surface is made of thermofused material with no visible seams, so it can be easily cleaned.

"The overbed table is so critical to the patient and care provider experience," concludes Rheault. "We feel the Opus Overbed Table brings significant design innovation and functionality to a place where it matters most—the bedside." ●

For more information, visit [www.nurture.steelcase.com](http://www.nurture.steelcase.com).

THE DESIGN Process

