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BUILDING, INTERIORS AND MARKETING IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PRACTICE PRESENTATION

Style Guide



SELECTING SURFACE FINISHES

There is one primary mistake many practices make when they set up initially or refurbish ... they select their surface finishes on the basis of what they would like in their own home. Whether it is the principal, or a job delegated to the practice manager, this is usually the only experience they have in carrying out the task and becomes the starting point.

Why is this a problem? Well a dental practice is not a home. It is a hard working 'commercial' healthcare environment. The surface finishes in a dental practice have a very important job. They must not just be aesthetically pleasing to the eye. They must work in conjunction with each other to create a visual experience that relaxes the patient, and gives them a sense of wellbeing, cleanliness, order, calm and sense of detail.

That's not all ... they also need to stand up to the wear and tear of the many people and varied functions of a dental practice during a fully booked clinical day, over a period of fifteen to 20 years. Finishes also need to be easy to clean, on a continual basis without deteriorating rapidly.

Let's take a quick overview of the basic finishes required...

WALLS & DOORS

Wall finishes are generally paint finishes, with a few exceptions where accent panels may be selected in some circumstances. Painted finishes are the most fragile surface in a practice, as well

as applied to the largest surface area, and the paint needs to be carefully chosen. Generally, a low sheen acrylic for walls will provide a durable and cleanable surface over a period of 5 years before potentially needing a freshen-up.

If strong colours are selected, I would usually suggest that they are applied as paint finishes as these are the easiest and least expensive to refresh, update, change as required. So, if you feel the need for a bright orange wall, do it in paint rather than any other expensive long lasting finish, as fashions change and this can be changed easily when you tire of it.

Doors can be a simple and effective accent if the budget allows for laminate, timber veneer or frosted glass. If a paint finish is selected for a door, there is benefit in providing a significant tonal change between walls and doors, making it easier to locate a specific door quickly. Darker door finishes will be easier to maintain. Paint finishes on doors are more serviceable in gloss or semi-gloss.

FLOORS

Floor finishes get a thrashing in a dental practice and need to be chosen with care to get long life and durability. While some floor coverings can cost a little more, they can be worthwhile if you get double the lifespan from the investment. In public areas, a carpet tile, or 'dressy' vinyl works best.

Carpet tiles wear incredibly well, over a long period of time (10 – 15 years at least if maintained well) are easily cleaned and if permanent damage occurs to one area, a quick replacement solves the problem.

Broadloom carpet, no matter how good the quality, will show tracking, be harder to clean and does not have the life span of a carpet tile.

If you want the warmth of a timber floor, use timber vinyl in preference to real timber, or 'floating' timber floors. Real timber floors require recoating to keep looking their best. The sanding and curing process required can be problematic. Both real timber and timber laminated floating floors have high footfall noise which amplifies the sound of foot traffic in a practice. This is a substantial negative as anything which creates sharper noise levels should be avoided in a dental environment.

Timber look vinyls, laid as individual boards are very effective, warming to the eye, durable, and easy to clean. When laid on concrete base, they also deaden the noise of footfall. They come in a huge variety of timber grains, are easy to maintain and have a very long life span when using a reputable commercial grade.

In clinical areas, a heat welded, homogenous, full thickness sheet vinyl or linoleum-laid with coved edges is ideal. The lighter ones are harder to keep clean and generally look 'harsher'. Do not be afraid of mid tone or deeper colours as they are generally more relaxing to the occupants, and easier to keep clean. Scuff marks on a light vinyl make a floor appear dirty, whereas a deeper floor will appear clean in the same circumstances.

Be wary of sheet vinyls with a coated surface wear layer as these can be problematic in a dental environment. I have seen numerous micro movements of a practitioners chair during clinical procedures, wear through the surface layer over time.

Flooring materials also need to be selected to ensure compliance with BCA requirements for fire safety. The CRF (Critical Radiant Flux) rating will be relevant depending on the fire safety measures of the particular building.

JOINERY

There are numerous options for the vertical faces of joinery throughout the practice. Polyurethane, heat-shrinking vinyl wrap, laminate, timber veneer, acrylic etc. All of these are readily available and durable finishes to joinery doors and drawer faces. Laminate or two pack finish would generally be most resistant to high wear, however, polyurethane finish are a little more vulnerable to high impact.

Benchtop surfaces in clinical areas are best in laminate, or solid surface options. Solid surface is preferable from a clinical perspective as sinks and splashbacks can be integral with no crevices to harbour bacteria, however, the budget may not stretch to accommodate this. There are an increasing number of solid surface finishes on the market in a number of thicknesses, with variable pricing but all are generally higher cost than laminate. Stainless steel or solid surface benchtops are ideal in the sterilizing area, from an infection control perspective, where budget is not limited.

Timber veneer finishes are best kept to dress areas of the practice as they are substantially higher in cost and less durable than laminates. The benefit is in their aesthetic. If timber appearance is wanted in a clinical environment, this can be achieved by using a timber grain laminate. There are some real timber veneers which are coated with melamine effectively giving them the durability, however, the unsealed edging still leaves them vulnerable to water staining and damage.

UPHOLSTERY

Any upholstered surface needs to stand up to high wear and tear, be cleanable, and durable. The benefits of upholstered seating is twofold in the waiting area. The comfort factor is increased, and the noise is reduced.

Here it is critical that fabrics or vinyls need to be chosen from commercial ranges as residential grade materials are simply not durable enough to withstand the abrasion from constant



seating and movement in a waiting room. Commercial fabrics are tested and graded according to their durability by a number of standards. Two of these most common are Martindale rub test and Wyzenbeek test method. It is recommended that the selected fabric or vinyl falls within the category of heavy duty commercial test compliance.

SUSTAINABILITY

Over the past decade there has been a huge movement to reduce the impact of manufacturing processes on our planet. There is an increasing range of excellent finishes available in Australia and New Zealand which have been developed to specifically provide 'green' alternatives which come at less cost to our environment.

Some people can react adversely to the volatile chemicals in standard paint manufacture. There are paints which have a low VOC rating (volatile organic compounds) and these are much safer and less toxic, with less odour.

Products with PVC (polyvinyl chloride) are gradually being replaced by products of alternative chemical structure due to toxicity. This can influence selections of flooring as well as upholstery materials.

Many carpet tile manufacturers have honed and amended the composition of their product to provide a 'greener' product to the market, with a higher recyclability to reduce landfill at end of life.

There are commercial fabric ranges which have a high content of recycled product from PTFE bottles. There are fabrics which have a high natural wool content which have high durability and low manufacturing imprint.

The selection of finishes overall should be taken seriously and carefully considered for their impact, benefit, durability, cost, suitability, ease of maintenance and impact to the environment. Flippant choices can be more costly in the long term. ♦

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