

Planning your practice is not as easy as you may think



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Space planning for your new healthcare practice can be like working on a 2000 piece puzzle.

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After you have made the decision to refurbish or relocate your practice, and ideally prepared a brief, space planning can begin. Planning the layout of your proposed practice can be a complicated but very exciting procedure. Having worked with thousands of doctors, dentists, veterinarians, podiatrists, physiotherapists and specialist surgeons in the past and from our experience, it will be much easier if you have already prepared a brief. This could include your vision and ideas around your priorities, possible traffic and spatial balance in your practice.

If you are moving to a new location, you may have already had to list your priorities to find enough space for your needs, an ideal location and a reasonable price. You will have to look more closely at your priorities during the space planning stage of the project to specify exactly the essential and optional areas in your brief.

The size of your premises and your budget are the two main determining factors in the design of your practice. The brief you have previously developed should be seen as a wish list, an ideal which may have to be changed or compromised to fit your available floor space and your financial constraints. Other constraints on your floor space and layout may be fixed structures such as columns and walls, existing windows and established entrances to the space. In some cases, commercial leases are taken in buildings where there is unlimited space available for the planned practice. However, every square metre used costs money, and therefore an efficient use of space is always cheaper.

Another important issue is the importance of visibility versus issues of privacy. Practices prioritising visibility through ground floor tenancies, windows and glass, have the advantage of attracting new customers and exhibiting an open and honest practice. However, privacy is often a concern for patients while being treated and for staff on a break. Many practices are now being fitted out in street-front retail space, where these privacy issues are inevitably raised.

An excellent way to save space and money if both are limited is to design rooms which are multifunctional (e.g. office/conference/consultation/staff meeting room). In offices, part-time staff may share desks to save space. These multi-functional rooms are a great idea for the administrative zones of your practice, but clinical zones cannot overlap in the same way, for the obvious reason of hygiene.

It is preferable for patients to progress through the practice



from one zone to the next, to maintain an efficient major traffic path in the surgery. As much as possible separate public zones (areas accessible to patients) from private zones (areas accessible to staff) to maintain security and privacy.

Keeping all clinical areas close together and administrative areas together, ensures movement around the practice is easier and safer for staff and patients.

Placement of some particular areas is critical, such as the centrality of the sterilising area to the surgeries and the placement of the patient WC before the clinical area for security and safety reasons. The utilities (e.g. photocopier, printer) must be central to the administrative areas and staff amenities should also be close to the staff room.

The end point of a patient's vision – what they see when moving throughout the practice – should be considered in space planning. Make certain that they will not be looking into private areas, at the back of equipment, or into other tenancies. Creating spatial balance is about maintaining consistency in the scale of different spaces in the practice. Avoid the contrast of grand waiting areas with poky surgeries, for example and keep all areas in the practice in proportion to each other.

Space planning often requires sacrifice from you and creativity on the part of the designer, but if you can determine your practices priorities, the process can be simplified. ♦