

HOSPITAL SPACES FOR CHILDREN CARE

Daniela Sorana

Environmental stress prevention in Children's Hospital Design. Technical guidelines and architectural suggestions is a new book that relates healthcare architecture with an innovative vision of care. The publication is the outcome of an extensive national research program (PRIN) developed by the Inter-University Centre TESIS (Florence University, Italy), that gained the support of the Italian Ministry of Education and Research that co-funded the initiative.

When dealing with children, we must bear in mind their sensitive and fragile psycho-social nature that makes them particularly vulnerable when constrained into hospitalization. Understanding the condition of children as patients is the first step to begin imagining new qualities for hospital spaces. Having said that, the book doesn't only address the child's perspective but also the family and staff's needs get widely investigated with innovative visions and suggestions about the hospital's role in promoting health and wellbeing for all its users.

The stress phenomenon is at the centre of the theoretical approach. As a consequence, the analysis of hospital environmental design is related to the physical-psycho-social stress suffered by people during hospitalization. This particular condition is fully described in the chapters devoted to the presentation of design criteria and suggestions, highlighted as means to prevent or mitigate the setting of stress in occupants. According to this approach, the design of hospital spaces becomes a tool to pursue therapeutic and salutogenic results that, in practical terms, determine advantages such as: a reduction of the length of time in hospital, of analgesics assumption, of general stress in any case associated with the hospitalization, an enhancement of staff performances and a diminished need of absenteeism for illness and turnover.

The hospital is therefore conceptually turned from efficient container of equipments and flows of people dedicated to the care of pathologies - as traditionally considered - into a complex socio-physical structure that actively takes part to the care and recovery process of patients through its environmental characteristics consciously aimed at supporting the multiple needs (psycho-sensorial, emotional, social-communicative, of clinical performance as well as of non-pharmacological treatment of the pain).

The importance of the stress-inducing and stress-reducing characteristics within the hospital environment is widely debated in the international scientific literature and clearly stated during the direct analysis carried out through interviews and questionnaires submitted to staff members, patients and patient's family at the Meyer Children's Hospital (Florence, Italy) that was assumed as a major case-study.

Study visits and interviews at paediatric structures both in Italy and abroad have been an essential part of our research. This type of 'real life' information, together with an extensive illustrative material, give the book a particular fresh approach to these important issues.

The book presents a series of design guidelines for the different spaces of children's hospital such as the patient room, the communal family and staff areas: by giving operative suggestions that enhance design solutions and control stress induced by the environment, we aim at improving the culture of healthcare projects.

In accordance with the new healing function of the hospital physical environment, our design indications give particular relevance to the psycho-emotional aspects without, at the same time, underestimating the importance of the characteristics of functional nature.

In order to offer the most exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge, the design guidelines are accompanied by technical information about the main aspects of the rules and regulations concerning the hospital spaces.

A wealth of illustrations help to describe the proposed design solutions in the chapters devoted to explain the new design guidelines. Photos, plans, functional-spatial schemes document innovative design solutions of recently built paediatric structures and exemplify the design indications expressed.

An essential book with worldwide perspectives that greatly contributes to the international literature, with an aim at improving both theoretical and practical approach to hospital design for children care.