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Your Gateway to the Floor Covering Industry

The evolving role of flooring in healthcare design



Mark Huxta wrote an informative article about how hospitals and other healthcare facilities should be expected to provide a safe and healthy environment for not just patients but a positive working experience for the staff who cares for them. The physical and emotional health of the nurse is likely to have a direct impact on the quality of care that they deliver.

Hospitals focus on enhancing the ergonomic conditions in the working environment to improve productivity and retention. Improved seating, better work tools, and new technology all contribute to a more ergonomically-friendly healthcare space. One of the not so obvious conditions that support the nursing staff is a clean and comfortable floor. Here is a statistic that may surprise you. The average age of today's nurse is 50 years old that works 10 to 12 hour shifts. During these shifts, they can walk numerous miles in one day. Today's nurses experience other physically demanding aspects of their job too.

By industry, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, injuries among healthcare workers rank among the highest. Musculoskeletal disorders account for one-third of all occupational injuries reported to employers, while back, leg, and foot fatigue follow closely behind. This is one of the reasons designers, facility managers, and healthcare administrators are paying acute attention to create environments that support the healthcare workforce.

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Healthcare Design and The Role of Flooring

Traditional flooring products tragically provide little if any ergonomic relief and contribute to pain, discomfort, and fatigue. In the past, flooring performance was solely measured by durability, maintainability, patient mobility, and affordability. Such features are not unimportant. However, we are entering a new age where the expectations for a floor are changing.

When building and designing a space, the focus of the work environment must be on people and not just about product. Specifically, how does the flooring and other materials in the hospital enhance the lives of patients, residents, and staff? Are you specifying an appropriately designed floor that is practically engineered for healthcare applications? You should.

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Research reveals relationship between working environments and wellness

Design studies studies for [healthcare facilities](#) indicate a clear relationship between the built environment and the impact of flooring on nurse wellness. Also revealed is the effect on the patient experience and health outcomes. It makes sense. A nurse that is not fatigued, stressed, or in pain provides better quality of care at bedside. Hospital staff who have experienced ergonomic flooring report better underfoot comfort and relief and also often mention the reduced noise and acoustic properties of the product. Nurses have even told us they requested reassignment to other hospital departments because of the better flooring areas.

An added benefit: According to [research](#), flooring products that reduce noise and provide superior acoustic properties also support the patient healing process, and reveal how ergonomics is playing a much larger role in product specification. Additional studies are underway now, including a Pebble Project focused on how flooring may reduce the risk of injury from patient falls, a concern that has both personal and financial ramifications for the patient and provider.

Lessons are learned. The direction of designers and architects today is away from the sterile, institutional environment to looks that are more natural, warmer, and homeopathic in design. This lends itself to influence from the hospitality industry with the focus on providing a soothing, pleasurable environment for patient, visitors, and staff.

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The Science

The science behind optimal flooring factors force reduction and energy restitution, or the storing and returning of energy. Force reduction measures the amount of energy a stepped-on-floor will absorb. Energy restitution measures the amount of energy a stepped-on-floor returns to the body; factors to consider when selecting the surface for a healthcare setting.

Softer floors absorb more energy and return less energy. Harder floors absorb less energy and return more energy. Less discomfort with softer floors. More discomfort with harder floors. Look for an optimal balance between the energy the floor should absorb and the amount of energy that should be returned.

Ecore's Forest rx flooring product, for example, uses a patented technology called itstru to fuse a Polyflor vinyl wear layer to a 5mm Ecore recycled rubber backing. It has been tested and shown to significantly reduce fall impact as well as provide excellent foot-fall reduction and energy return compared to other traditional resilient floorcoverings.

Ecore's Rx products are additionally capable of reducing structure-borne sound, which provides a much quieter space. Designers, architects, and specifiers are now even more attentive to the ergonomic materials in the healthcare setting. This include how a floor the foundation of the healthcare environment design contributes the staff's comfort and health; who in turn have a better quality of life, which has an impact on the quality of care they provide, which is likely to measurably contribute meaningful improvements in patient care and overall satisfaction rates.

Comfortable, ergonomic flooring contributes to reduced chronic pain, improved staff productivity, patient quality of care, reduced absenteeism, workman compensation claims and improves the quality of life for dedicated healthcare providers.



[Ecore](#) aligns substantial force reduction with a balanced amount of energy return, a combination which create surfaces that are likely to meet virtually every commercial flooring application need.

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Flooring Updates

By Betty

Flooring Network

For those in the market and those that serve it

Floor Covering Media, a business network serving the floor covering industry, provides readers timely, objective news and information about flooring topics.

Floor Search

Answers to Questions About Flooring

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