

Increase Patient Satisfaction

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By Renovating and Reimagining Your Reception Area

When designing a new office, renovating, or remodeling, you have an exciting opportunity to create a patient-friendly, efficient workspace. While the treatment rooms are important, the reception area may have an even greater impact on the patients' experience. It is the first thing patients see upon walking through the door, and it is where they will form an opinion of your practice.

Patient satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) begins long before any treatment occurs. After spending 20 minutes in an uncomfortable chair, located in a crowded and dreary room, they are displeased before they ever see you. Alternately, they can form a positive opinion of your practice after spending the same length of time in comfortable and welcoming surroundings with ample amenities.

Create a patient friendly space

To a great degree, the design of your reception is dictated by the amount of space available. The first consideration should be seating, which is the primary purpose of the room. Ideally, plan for enough to accommodate your typical number of patients, with a few extra seats.

Chairs in narrow rows or lining the walls create an industrial atmosphere, reminiscent of an airport. If the room is too crowded, patients are likely to feel claustrophobic and become irritable. It can also make navigation difficult for people using mobility aids, parents carrying small children, and the elderly.

When planning the furniture layout, consider your target clientele. For example, parents favor couches or clusters of chairs, because it is easy to keep children close. People with mobility problems often prefer benches, and benefit from having handrails nearby. Imagine your typical patient, and try to design a space that would be convenient for him or her.

If you have more space than needed for seating, consider adding features to make your reception area more functional, patient-friendly, and distinctive. This may include:

- **Children's play area** — This is an excellent addition to a pediatric or family-friendly practice. Include plenty of toys and games, but try to avoid noisy ones, especially if the space is inside your primary reception area. Ideally, it should be a separate room, unless you see children exclusively. Don't forget one or more grownup size chairs, and a sign indicating that supervision is necessary. Some parent-pampering practices even provide massage chairs.
- **Work station** — Does your practice cater to busy professionals? If so, they are probably checking emails while waiting to see you. Consider adding a couple of desks or small tables in a quiet, well-lit corner of the reception area. Electrical outlets or charging hubs should be accessible. Patients will appreciate the convenience, and recognize that you value their time.
- **Patient intake area** — A private or semi-private space, such as an alcove, will make patient check-in simpler and more discreet. This is especially beneficial for high-end cosmetic practices, where privacy may be a high priority with many patients.
- **Retail product display** — This is commonly seen in dermatology offices, but it can be tailored to virtually any type of medical practice. Doctors might want to offer recommended supplements and healthy recipe books, while dentists could display a line of oral care products.
- **Aesthetic focal point** — A large aquarium, fountain, or display of plants can add ambiance to your space, and help patients feel calmer. This is especially appropriate for holistic and natural-medicine focused practices. Art displays, statues, or architectural elements such as large pillars are also good choices.

What does your reception area say ABOUT YOUR PRACTICE?

If your dental or medical practice doesn't make a good first impression, patient satisfaction will suffer. The reception area is the first thing people see, and it makes a statement about your practice. What is it saying?



SENDING THE WRONG MESSAGE



- ▶ Our office isn't sanitary – dirty carpets, fingerprints on counters, smudged windows, foul odors
- ▶ We don't want to talk to you – receptionist not present or behind glass doors, excess instructional signage
- ▶ Quality doesn't matter – shoddy furnishings, inadequate seating, lack of amenities, void of decor
- ▶ We're a little behind the times – worn carpet, structure in poor repair, outdated decor, paper forms
- ▶ Your time and convenience are not important – insufficient parking spaces, confusing or unnecessarily long forms, no wi-fi

SENDING THE RIGHT MESSAGE

- ▶ Safety and sanitation are a top priority – sparkling clean surfaces, hand sanitizer available, handrails and similar safety features where appropriate
- ▶ Welcome! We are happy to see you – Receptionist visible and available, patient is personally greeted, inviting and aesthetically pleasing setting
- ▶ Only the highest quality will do – well coordinated designs, attention to detail, new (or new-looking) floor and wall coverings
- ▶ Our practice features the latest and greatest – modern designs, everything in an excellent state of repair, electronic forms
- ▶ We respect your time, and make healthcare convenient – sign-in area is immediately recognizable, restrooms adjacent to the main reception area, plentiful parking close to the door



SIMPLE WAYS TO MAKE A BETTER IMPRESSION



- ▶ Protect carpet with a welcome mat in high traffic areas
- ▶ Set a rigid cleaning schedule, or hire a professional service
- ▶ Add a few potted (real or artificial) plants
- ▶ Discard worn, outdated, and soiled magazines
- ▶ Greet every patient with a friendly smile
- ▶ Use warm and friendly lighting, such as incandescent or daylight bulbs
- ▶ Display a few tasteful seasonal decorations
- ▶ Keep blinds open; use translucent coverings if glare is a problem

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Interior design with a purpose

In many medical offices, there is no planned design scheme. The carpet was purchased five years ago. A couple years later the wallpaper needed replacing, so the receptionist was instructed to just pick something. Now the office needs more seating, so the doctor is purchasing a few chairs that happen to be on sale.

A haphazard collection of uncoordinated fabrics and furnishings speaks of carelessness, giving patients the impression that you are disinterested in their experience. It may be tempting to avoid the problem by choosing plain, industrial, or nondescript furnishings. However, the last thing you want is for your office to look just like every other medical or dental practice.

Research has shown that interior design has an impact on patients' perceived quality of care. Strive for an aesthetically pleasing and distinctive design. Most importantly, it should reflect the personality of your practice, and set an appropriate mood.

Tips for decor

- Choose a color theme that coordinates with your logo, which is typically displayed prominently.
- Opt for timeless styles rather than trendy. Otherwise, your office will be outdated quickly or need frequent remodeling.
- Choose high quality carpets, upholstery, and wallpaper. In a high-traffic setting, durability is a much better value than less expensive, flimsy materials.
- Avoid textured surfaces, dry-clean only linens, and other hard to clean surfaces.
- Use transparent panels to protect walls and countertops in areas most susceptible to wear, such as the check-in counter or kid's area.
- Keep your office brightly lit, preferably with natural light.
- Display artwork or other decorative accents. If you are on a tight budget, reach out to the local art community. Artists often seek businesses to display their work.
- Music is just as important to the atmosphere as visual elements are. Choose non-offensive, soothing sounds, free of advertisements.
- Hire a professional to help. Even if you, or someone in your office, has an artistic eye, interior design can be more complex than you would expect. Be sure to choose a designer who has specific experience working with medical or dental practices.

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