

The Art of Healing

How artwork can improve patient outcomes

Today's healthcare environment considers many factors. While hospitals and doctors' offices were once designed strictly to address utilitarian concerns such as efficiency and treatment platforms, today's facilities must also consider the psychological and social needs of patients and staff. Studies have shown that spaces designed with these needs in mind can soothe anxiety, lower blood pressure, and even reduce the need for medications⁽¹⁾.



A lobby art installation at St. Mary's Heart Institute in Evansville, IN

Well-designed healthcare space takes many factors into account throughout the design, development and construction phases of a project. Selecting the right artwork for your space is just one of many considerations that plays an important role in the healing environment.

Whether in an inpatient or outpatient setting, artwork can have an enormous effect not only on a patient's psychological experience, but on their physical outcomes as well. For example, a study of patient anxiety in a dental clinic showed that patients felt less stress in a waiting room featuring a large nature mural than in a waiting room with no artwork at all⁽²⁾. Similarly, a study of patients recovering from open heart surgery showed that those who were exposed to nature-themed art experienced less post-operative anxiety than those who had no art in their rooms⁽³⁾.

For healthcare, the type of artwork selected is vital. Often the pieces we enjoy in our homes or at an art gallery can actually be counterproductive to a patient's well-being. For example, while the last study showed improved outcomes with nature art, patients exposed to abstract art during their recovery experienced more anxiety than those who were not around any type of art. Some doctors and researchers have observed that abstract art that is ambiguous or features harsh angles may be upsetting to patients.

In a broad study conducted by Roger Ulrich and Laura Gilpin for the book, "Putting Patients First", the researchers found that patients usually favored nature-based art. Their top recommendations for healthcare art included:

- Pieces with visual depth and openness in the foreground
- Pieces depicting calm water and weather
- Abstract landscapes
- Landscapes featuring low hills or mountains
- Warm-climate landscapes

Personalization of a patient's artwork can maximize its calming and therapeutic effects and advancing technology may soon make such personalization widely available. At the Witham Health Services ER, for example, patients undergoing imaging procedures may choose from a selection of nature scenes to be projected on the imaging room wall during their procedure. Such advances will likely continue to improve healthcare environments in the years to come.

At BremnerDuke Healthcare Real Estate, we understand that your real estate strategy is about more than just bricks and mortar - it's about improving outcomes, meeting your community's needs and providing excellent patient care. From planning to completion, BremnerDuke provides healthcare real estate expertise you need to make your vision a reality.

1. Ulrich, Roger S. "Effects of health facility interior design on wellness: Theory and recent scientific research" *Journal of Health Care Design* (1991)
2. Ulrich, Roger S. "How Design Impacts Wellness." *Healthcare Forum Journal* (September-October, 1992)
3. Ulrich, R. S., Lundén, O., and J. L. Eltinge. "Effects Of Exposure To Nature And Abstract Pictures On Patients Recovering From Heart Surgery." Paper presented at the Thirty-Third Meetings of the Society for Psychophysiological Research, Rottach-Egern, Germany. Abstract published in *Psychophysiology*, 30 (Supplement 1, 1993)

Additional Resources:

- *Picture of Health: Handbook for Healthcare Art*, by Henry Domke, M.D.
- *Putting Patients First*, edited by Susan B Frampton