

8 HEALTH

# Lousy wards where

Garish lighting, the smell of floor cleaner ... just being in hospital is enough to make you feel ill. But things are changing – because good decor is good for your health. By Kerry Whitehead

**T**HE effect of beautiful objects ... is hardly at all appreciated. Variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery."

They could be the words of a trendy interior designer. But, in fact, the speaker was Florence Nightingale in 1859.

The sentiment may be old, but it is as true today as it was then, according to designers working with the NHS and some of Scotland's leading charities.

The idea that the look and feel of hospital buildings has an impact on patients isn't new; as far back as the eighteenth-century, "sanatoriums" were specifically designed to have a positive effect on patients. More than that design and decor have a tangible impact on patient wellbeing and can even boost staff morale.

But in practice, environmental factors have usually been bottom of the list in planning health-related building projects.

Experts say buildings may not cure people, but there is an increasing understanding that they can make patients more positive and help staff deliver better care.

This theory is now being applied across Scotland within the NHS and by charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Maggie's Centres and the Teenage Cancer Trust, which are giving healthcare buildings a much-needed makeover.

Simon Henderson heads up Macmillan's Cancer Environments department – his team uses the latest research on 'healing environments' to build specialist centres for people living with cancer. He says: "In design, if you're not focusing first on the patient experience, you really have lost sight of what it's all about. A whole range of environmental factors – including lighting, colour, aroma, views, art, scale, proportion, sound, texture and materials – have a powerful healing and therapeutic effect on patients." Two of Scotland's newest cancer wards, Ward One at the Western General in Edinburgh and the new Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre, have adopted the theory with their own "grand designs".

Throughout the recently-refurbished Ward One, rooms are flooded with light, comfortable armchairs line walls painted in fresh lilac and huge windows look out on to a garden.

Fiona Borrowman, from Midlothian, sat on a patient focus group which gave designers at the Western General an insight into patients' needs.

Diagnosed with advanced breast cancer in 2003 and an NHS employee herself, Fiona is all too familiar with the inside of hospitals. "When you are receiving cancer treatment, you aren't exactly feeling cheery, so there's nothing worse than sitting in a hard chair, staring at dreary coloured walls," she says. "From deciding on fabric, to choosing the right shade of paint, we all drew on our own experiences. In hospital you're often looking at the same surroundings, week after week so even little things, like a having a nice view, make a massive difference."

It is no coincidence that the new ward looks right into the pretty garden of Edinburgh's Maggie's Centre. "Ask someone to

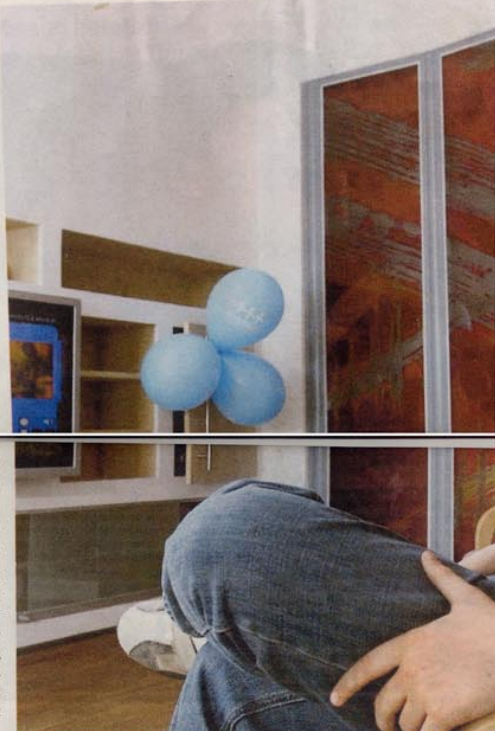
describe a Maggie's Centre and you can be virtually guaranteed they'll use the word 'homey', observes Laura Lee, chief executive at Maggie's Centres. She speaks from experience – the former nurse has witnessed how an entirely clinical setting can harm a patient's sense of wellbeing. "We're not criticising the NHS – clinical function and

expert medical care have a huge role to play. But good buildings make a difference and give people a sense of being in control, often at a time when they feel so much less in control," she adds.

Lee explains that good design is in the things we don't see as much as the things we do. As an example, she says, in a Maggie's Centre, visitors must ask to use the toilet, as unlike traditional healthcare buildings there are no signs on the door. "You wouldn't go to a friend's house and expect to see a toilet sign on their bathroom door, would you?"

It's not a glamorous way to start a conversation, but Lees says it's often these incidental chats which encourage people to open up. And it isn't just patients who feel the benefits of good design – it affects families and carers too. Klaus Frommel, a businessman from North Berwick, lost his wife to leukaemia last year. He still visits Maggie's for support and says he feels 10ft taller when he walks into the centre's brightly painted kitchen.

"I remember the first time we came here. The rooms are designed just like your living



# the healing caves in

## 'NHS bosses should try living in a ward'

This week, experts in healthcare building design will meet in Glasgow for the fifth World Congress for Design and Health.

Held for the first time in the UK, the global gathering will highlight new research and provide momentum for change.

Opening the five-day event will be John Wells-Thorpe OBE, an internationally-renowned architect. The only UK architect who has chaired an NHS trust, his mission is to convince NHS bosses that architectural psychology is not a fancy phrase; rather, it is as crucial to healthcare as the latest drugs.

It's time the NHS woke up, says Wells-Thorpe. "Good, appropriate hospital design is vital. It's not just the icing on the cake. It's integral.

"Some physicians say they are the ones that heal. But architects can play a role, too, through design. It promotes self-healing."

This is more than opinion. Wells-Thorpe's own research was the first to demonstrate that hospital environments bring measurable differences in patient recovery. A four-year study

for the NHS examined orthopaedic trauma and mental health patients moving from old wards into new, specially-designed units. Not only were patients in the newer units more satisfied with their wards, they also thought they received better care.

Crucially, patients had better outcomes and recovered faster in the newer units. The length of stay for non-operative orthopaedic patients was reduced by 21%. Staff noted a dramatic drop in the amount of analgesic medication needed by orthopaedic patients.

Mental health patients saw their length of stay reduced by 14%. Staff on the new ward recorded less aggression, and fewer verbal outbursts and threatening behaviour by

patients. Self-harm dropped and patients spent less time in seclusion. The evidence was indisputable.

Did NHS bosses take notice? "Not much. Little action has been taken since then," laments Wells-Thorpe, "although there's been a lot of talk." He estimates that the design of 90% of healthcare buildings fails to meet patients' needs.

If architectural psychology is to affect the design of future hospitals, some feel NHS bosses must be convinced that it can bring clinical and financial returns.

Lorraine Nicholson believes the only other route to change would be if enough NHS bosses spent time as patients themselves.



Lorraine Nicholson recovered after hip surgery. Her ward was brightened up by art.

Nicholson was a patient in the secure mental health unit at Perth's Murray Royal Hospital. Depressed and weighing just five stone, she found the sterile wards deeply counterproductive.

"Every day I saw miles of soulless corridors. Nothing was on the walls. It was so boring. I was the 45-year-old. There was nothing to take me out of that dark space in my head."

One day, this changed. Artwork was brought in and put up around the ward. A small change, its impact was huge. Indeed, Nicholson says it kick-started her recovery.

"It's no exaggeration – that simple change helped me turn a new corner in my life."

"People are like plants," she says now. "Put them in the right environment and they flourish. Put them in a dark room and they die."

NHS bosses should try living in a ward themselves for a few weeks. Let's see how they plan the next new hospital then."

EVA LANGLANDS

room and that's where the emphasis is – on living. The expertise of medical staff is invaluable, but it was wonderful to come here, put the kettle on and escape the medical world for a few hours," says Klaus.

Little things matter. Staff use a different brand of floor cleaner from the one used in the hospital because patients associate that particular smell with having treatment.

"There's nothing clinical here. When my wife was having treatment, home was a long drive away but we could come here and instantly feel welcome and in a sense closer to home," explains Klaus.

**H**OME from home is a recurrent theme. Allister Boyd, 18, uses the same words to describe his first impressions of the new Teenage Cancer Unit funded by the Teenage Cancer Trust at the new Beatson in Glasgow. Thankfully, he is now in remission but in 2003 the Ayrshire youngster was diagnosed with a brain tumour and remembers how it felt to be treated in an older ward, where the decor was dated: "The doctors do a great job, but I was in a dreary ward and most

Allister Boyd, 18, who suffered from a brain tumor last year, said the pleasant surroundings in the new Beatson made a big difference in his recovery. Left, Klaus Frommel, who lost his wife to leukaemia, in the kitchen at the Maggie's Centre

Pictures: Alan Thomson and Cate Gillon

people there were much older. The new Beatson is completely different."

He says features such as the cinema, panoramic city views and plasma screen TVs which the new ward boasts genuinely make a big difference. "It's really important to feel positive when you're unwell," he explains.

Throughout the new wards, mood lighting, colour co-ordinated floors and stained glass soften the clinical feel, while balconies allow people having chemotherapy to get some fresh air. Professor Alan Rodger, medical director of the new Beatson, hopes the facilities will help patients feel more relaxed: "Key to the design has been the creation of a calm, relaxing and therapeutic environment for patients to improve their wellbeing and enhance their recuperation. Colour, shape, light and furnishings have been central to the overall ambience of the centre. The result is a pleasant environment not just for patients but also for the 800 staff who work here every day."

Staff are the third group to feel the benefits. Caroline McKinnel is a senior chemotherapy nurse based in the Western

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