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# Healthcare and Hospitals: Furniture Trends of the Future

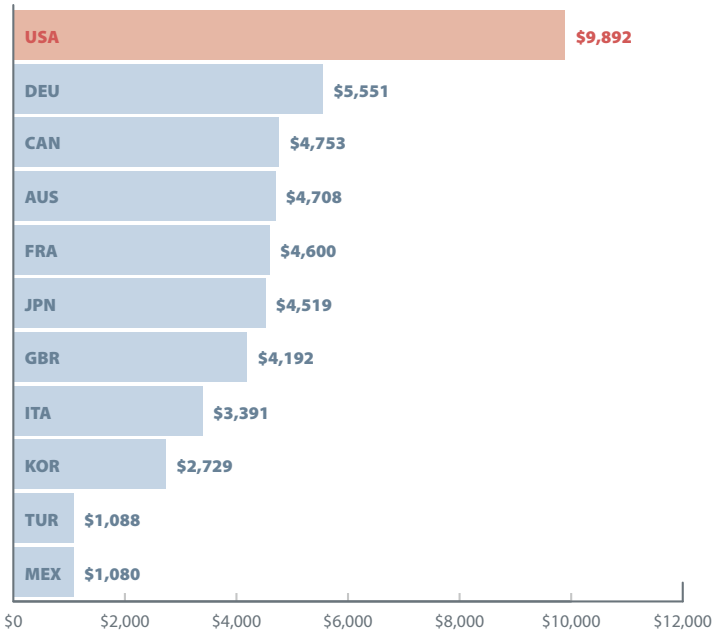
As healthcare needs for Americans change, so do plans for patient facilities of the future. Like any organization, healthcare is adjusting to rapid advancements in technology, shifting demographics, and an expanding focus on human-centered and evidence-based design. Here at Haworth, empirical evidence supports our workplace expertise, and we're leveraging that in the healthcare industry. Our recent study considers some of the ways these evolving dynamics uniquely impact healthcare: Patient rooms increasingly need to address infection reduction, facilities need to maximize space, and caregivers are increasingly looking to more flexible furniture options.

## A Dynamic Healthcare Landscape

Tomorrow's patient rooms will need to transcend today's accommodations with equipment, procedures, and patient dynamics that are only the emerging trends of today. Healthcare professionals are demanding patient space that serves multiple uses for treatments that are yet to be developed. As science continues to find ways for people to *get* better, healthcare workers and interior designers want to find ways for people to *feel* better while they're resting and recuperating.

The United States spends more on healthcare than any other nation in the world. A whopping $3.3 trillion accounted for 17.9 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016.[1] In fact, healthcare spending is expected to grow 1.2 percentage points faster than the GDP per year to a staggering 20 percent of the GDP by 2025.[2]

**Per Capita Healthcare Spending 2016**




Recent changes in US healthcare regulations have helped introduce more Americans to some kind of healthcare coverage. In 2016, more than 91.2 percent of Americans had coverage, either through private or government insurance. With more insured patients shopping for health providers, hospitals could see an increase in competition to attract those patients.

Across the country, more than 5,500 hospitals are preparing to care for the next generation of patients, as well as the changing needs of America's aging population.[3] A recent 2017 study indicates hospital executives believe design changes in their facilities will dramatically affect the satisfaction of their clients. For that reason, hospitals are looking beyond clinical and non-clinical staff to a more patient-centered care model. To help make decisions on design of new facilities, they're looking at the dynamics of patients and their families as well.[4]

So, what will influence patient spaces in the future? The answers are important for both those tasked with designing patient areas, and for those who manufacture furnishings for these spaces.

To better understand emerging patient space trends that could shape the future, we commissioned a research project focusing on experts most in tune with patient room layout and furniture needs: interior designers. Through their perspective, we closely examined nearly 20 trends related to the healthcare industry; changing national demographics and business practices are expected to influence the design of patient rooms in the near future.

**Healthcare Interior Design Trend Drivers**




## What Healthcare Designers Say

The objective was simple: Get a better understanding of how patient rooms—particularly those in hospitals and surgical centers—might evolve in the years ahead. In-depth interviews were conducted with interior designers that specialize in healthcare facility design—a group most influential and knowledgeable about patient rooms and the furniture that fills them.

1 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2016.
2 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2016.
3 Healthcare Financial Management Association, 2017.
4 Healthcare Financial Management Association, 2017.

Overall, designers said they think of furniture in terms of three main categories:



**Patient**
bed, overbed table, patient chair or recliner/glider, and casegoods

**Family**
couch/sleeper/ recliner/glider, casegoods, and folding chairs

**Caregiver**
overbed table, casegoods, and rolling physician stool

Within these categories, primary factors for consideration are:




Together they help create a picture of how patient-centered care and evidence-based design influence where patient room design may be headed, and provide insight that could potentially help designers and decision makers better anticipate the needs of their healthcare clients.

## Findings: Healthcare Trends

The factors affecting growth and changes taking place in the US healthcare industry are mind boggling. To stay competitive, healthcare leaders are aggressively working to get ahead of patient care trends and macroeconomic factors that affect the way they do business. This research indicates more input is being solicited from front-line healthcare workers to help make the decisions that drive system-wide changes.

As healthcare science introduces an astonishing amount of new treatments, therapies, and medicines, consumers are also more educated than ever. Today, many feel empowered to "shop" for competing healthcare services in their local areas.

This all comes at a time when providers are facing increased public scrutiny from government and consumer advocacy quality measurements.



*Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates there have been significant reductions in hospital associated infections (HAI), though the threat of infection liability remains a crucial concern throughout healthcare organizations.*[5]

To help combat this, many healthcare workers expressed a need for furniture with easy-to-clean surfaces. Typically, wood is a material associated with bringing a feeling of comfort and familiarity to a space. However, illustrating the difficulty of meeting both health standards and patient-centered preferences, nurse managers overwhelmingly said its porous surface doesn't hold up well to hospital-issued cleaning agents.

"Several of today's superbugs are drug-resistant, so the risk of spreading infection is high."

– Sara Marberry, Healthcare Design Consultant

Cleanability of surface materials is more important than ever, according to Sara Marberry, a healthcare design knowledge expert and industry consultant with over 100 published articles on the topic to her name.

Haworth's research also indicates nurse managers cite "shrinking floor space" as a growing concern in many facilities. That means facilities are expected to do more with less—so many times spaces need to do double-duty.

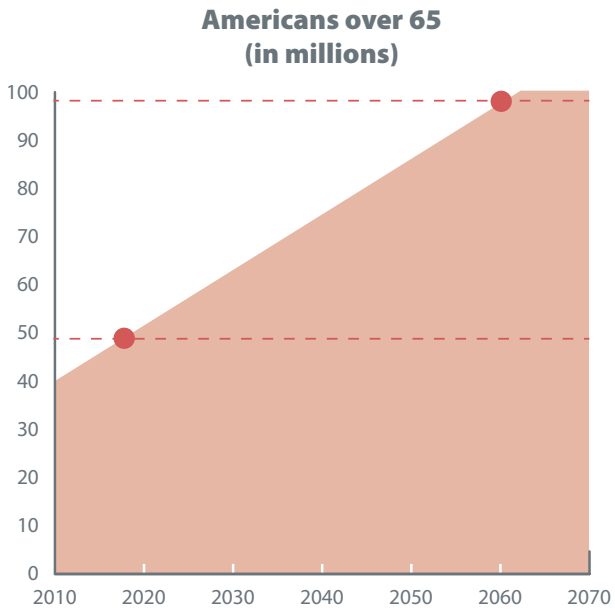


*Multipurpose furniture like sleeper chairs are more appealing to those tasked with managing the space efficiently and comfortably because they can solve for multiple situations with one piece of furniture.*

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016.

## Findings: Demographic Trends

Society as a whole is also changing, with demographic, social, and behavioral trends now having a direct influence on how patient areas are used. As people change, so do their healthcare needs. Subjects in our research highlighted two areas of change they have observed over time that are affecting how healthcare facilities plan and operate: an aging patient population and expanding ethnic and cultural diversity.




Americans are clearly living longer. The total percentage of those 65 and older is expected to rise nearly 10 percent in the next 40 years. According to interior designers, this means there's a rising need for functionality when selecting furniture for aging patient populations. Older patients typically appreciate far more intuitive controls and larger readouts, as well as furniture that is easier for patients to get in and out of.[6]

The American population is also becoming more diverse, with no clear single racial or ethnic majority projected by 2055. This societal shift may create language barriers that could be addressed with more graphical symbols and multiple language options on readouts.[7]

And, when interior designers discussed how patient-centered care for an increasingly diverse patient population dictates furniture selection, they said they simply need more of it. For instance, many cultures often rely on a large, multi-generational family support system—that means more people spending more time in a patient's room. So, managers are looking for more ways to accommodate with increased quantity and more efficient design.



Perhaps one of the most dramatic shifts in society over the past two decades has been connectivity. Many of today's healthcare facilities were likely built at a time when family members still used landlines or pay phones to relay updates on loved ones. Today they're more likely to be blogging updates from a patient room, or using their connected devices to research healthcare options and pay bills as they sit with their family member. As a result, interior designers are looking for small desks and furniture with charging ports to better accommodate patients' guests.

## Findings: Industry Trends

As the American healthcare system expands and changes, variations in the way business is conducted is inevitable. Adapting to an increase in competition for patients, healthcare facilities are adopting architecture and design characteristics typically associated with the hotel and hospitality industry. To increase both effectiveness and efficiency, designers are trusting brands that conduct and publish credible research. Those in charge of sourcing are expecting more reliability and service from suppliers.

Historically, hospitals and physician offices have been designed with more focus on medical procedures than patient experience. But today, interior designers say they're moving away from anything that appears "institutional," and towards patient experience that promotes a more healing and positive patient atmosphere. Some organizations are leading the charge, providing education and information to help create patient-centered care within healthcare environments.

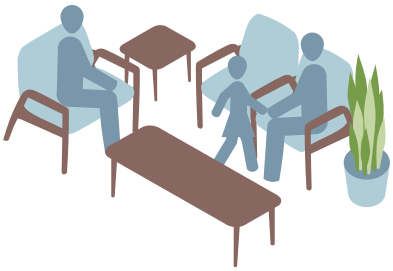
"Hospitals are places where both patients and staff are under tremendous stress. Designers should be choosing furnishings and fabrics with empathy towards the patient experience."

– Sara Marberry, Healthcare Design Consultant

6 The Population Reference Bureau, 2016.

7 Pew Research Center, 2016.

Buildings also have more common spaces where guests can congregate or share meals outside the patient area. While this may be a positive trend for medical staff who need space to work and patients who need time to rest, it also means the furnishings in these shared areas must be able to withstand the wear and tear of constant use. And, as noted in our previous research on perceived wait times, organization of guest areas can pay large dividends in satisfaction surveys.[8]



Also, perhaps taking a page from the hospitality industry and recent design trends in general, mid-century modern has become a popular design choice for healthcare facilities. Haworth's research found that interior designers prefer this contemporary and progressive look for its technology-driven designs. As one respondent noted, "People want to be assured that they are getting the best healthcare and the best equipment available."

A final factor in this study revealed a growing emphasis on reliable products and seamless service. With so much at stake in the healthcare industry, there's a true need for furniture that can be installed without affecting patient care, and that will require little to no maintenance. To meet these demands, there's an increased emphasis on pieces that are tried-and-true. Designers are looking for brands and designs with proven track records, nimble delivery options, and easy-to-replace components.

## Impact of Trends on Specified Furniture

Respondents believe it takes three-to-five years for emerging trends to be reflected in patient room designs, and when examining the responses of research participants, a few observations come to light. Overall, the findings suggest the future will bring a greater need for recliners/gliders, casegoods, and visitor chairs. Items like sofas and sleepers are decreasing in popularity because of space concerns, while demand for patient chairs and overbed tables remains flat.

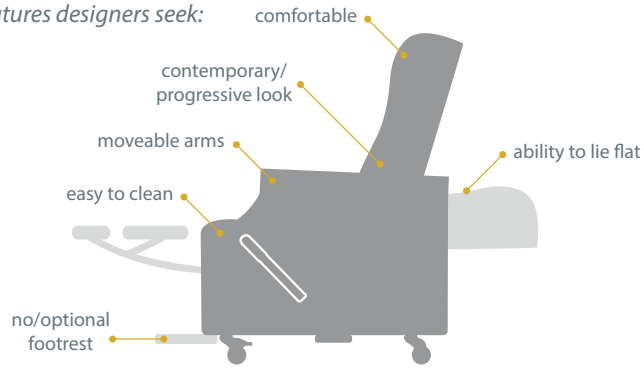
Joshua Crews, Design Team Director at NELSON, says, "We routinely assess and set specific priorities around these primary questions: Can the patient interact with the family comfortably, can the furniture be moved to have conversations, does the furniture accommodate multiple visitors, and can the furniture be quickly moved out of the way for medical procedures?"

> "We are seeing an increase in demand for flexible furnishings and more furniture that specifically allows the family to be part of the care team."
>
> – Joshua Crews, Design Team Director, NELSON

### Recliners/Gliders

Shrinking floor space and accommodating more guests will likely create more demand for recliners and gliders. Their versatility in the patient space will overtake the need for sofas and sleepers.

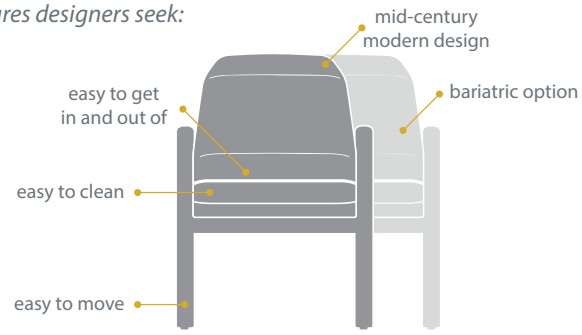
*Features designers seek:*




### Visitor Chairs

Visitor chairs will remain a staple for any patient area. However, considering demographic trends and the rise of shared areas in hospitals, the quantity needed is expected to rise.

*Features designers seek:*

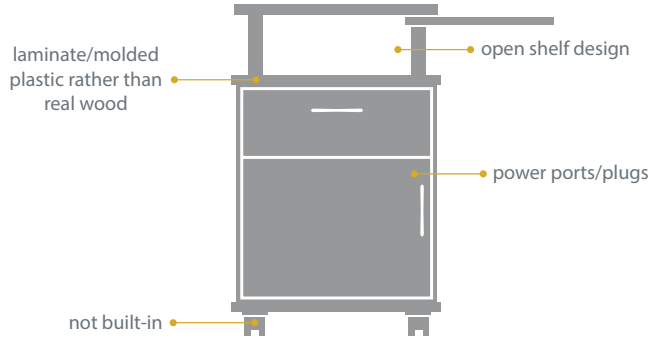



8 Haworth, Inc., 2017.

### Casegoods

While casegoods may be infrequently specified currently, as facility managers look to more flexible building designs, mobile casegoods may become more popular.

*Features designers seek:*




## Conclusion

Healthcare is changing, patient needs are changing, and hospitals are changing along with them. No one can be certain what the future will hold when it comes to patient room design, but the indications are clear: Patient-centered care and evidence-based design are primary drivers for decision makers at healthcare facilities across the US.

Our research indicates healthcare design is taking a direction that continues to home in on reducing infection risk and maximizes shrinking floor space. Facilities are looking for furniture with flexible applications to help meet needs for patients and their families for years to come.

Continued research, observation, and testing of medical furniture will become increasingly important as hospitals strive to stay ahead of the trends that will shape the healthcare environments of tomorrow.

## Author

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Brandware Public Relations is an independently owned, full-service public relations and digital communications agency with offices in Atlanta, Charleston and Los Angeles. Brandware uses the latest PR, social, digital, and research techniques to build clients' brands in a variety of industries.

## Editor



**Beck Johnson** holds a B.S. in Scientific and Technical Communication and an M.A. in Communication. With 15+ years of experience in social science research methodologies and as a Senior Research Specialist at Haworth she conducts primary and secondary research addressing workplace issues—creating knowledge insights to support Haworth's vision as industry knowledge leader. Her goal is to build knowledge of leading workplace issues and related social science and provide credible communication to clients and their teams at various stages of the design process.

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