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## 5 ways to optimize space in your practice

Did you know the physical design of your practice can influence the relationships you have with your patients? Where you choose to place furnishings and how you decorate may create inefficiencies and drive down patient satisfaction. Learn how to positively influence those who pass through your practice with five quick and cost-effective design techniques that can smooth your work flow, increase patient safety and enhance patient and team interactions.



As a physician, you work with patients to treat current conditions and prevent future illnesses. Preventive treatment can start from the moment patients enter your practice—what do they see and experience? How do patients move through the space throughout their visit, and how do they feel as they navigate their visit? How does your staff navigate that same space?

Addressing these questions with simple design solutions may lower patient anxiety and enhance team culture. A [free online module](#) in the AMA's [STEPS Forward collection](#) shows you how.

Use these five steps to optimize your practice's space:

**1. Develop team work stations that enhance interactions.** Well-designed work stations and pods can improve efficiency and strengthen team culture.

### Here's how:

- Place exam rooms close to the team's work area to minimize the space that must be traveled between tasks and improve exam room visibility.
- Create opportunities for your team to naturally interact to cultivate a more collegial atmosphere. Glass partitions allow teammates to see each other while conserving privacy and minimizing noise.

**2. Place furnishing to encourage patient engagement.** The arrangement, shapes and types of desks, examination tables and chairs can work together to encourage productive interactions and eye contact.

**Here's how:**

- If a patient can sit in a chair to speak with the physician instead of spending the entire visit on the examination table, they are more likely to feel positively about the visit.
- Mount computers on the wall on a swivel arm or use laptops so your team is free to shift their position to face the patient.

**3. Add positive distractions to alleviate patient anxiety.** Patients take in your clinic's surroundings to gather clues about the quality of care they will receive. This may influence their confidence in the practice and their overall experience.

**Here's how:**

- Sitting in a waiting room can be stressful. Patients may feel anxious or dissatisfied based on their waiting room experience. Positive distractions, such as window views of natural settings, divert attention away from stressors and create a positive mood.
- Television can exacerbate the stress of waiting. Calming artwork depicting landscapes with high visual depth, healthy foliage, warm weather or positive relationships between people are best for lowering anxiety.

**4. Reconfigure rooms to feel spacious and welcoming.** There is no need to tear down walls or build new rooms to make a space seem more spacious. Simple rearranging can make a small room feel more open and comfortable.

**Here's how:**

- Brighten up a consultation space with additional lighting or soften harsh overhead lighting. Place examination tables at an angle to free up wall space for more chairs.
- Using light, warm-colored paint on the walls can add to the positive effect of the artwork you chose in Step Three.

**5. Connect with patients while incorporating technology.** Typing or examining a patient's electronic health record can take away from patient interaction and frustrate physicians and patients.

**Here's how:**

- Increase your eye contact share a computer screen with your patients to positively influence their engagement and adherence to treatment. Semi-circular desks and large monitors can help you maintain face to face contact and also involve patients in their own information.
- Try implementing a [team documentation process](#), in which a nurse, medical assistant or documentation specialist helps with record keeping to allow the physician to provide more undivided attention to patients.

**What physicians are saying about changing their practice space**

"We were inconveniencing our patients and creating unnecessary work for ourselves," said Morris Gagliardi, MD, associate medical director of Gouverneur Health in New York.

"Focusing on better wayfinding for patients and grouping like services together in the clinic revealed incredible opportunities for us to better deliver a more efficient, patient-centered experience," he said.

North Carolina family physician Michael Toedt, MD, has found that adjacent team rooms with partially open space between teams work best. He decided not to have any private offices in their new facility.

“As a physician, I am not running around to find the team members I need to coordinate care,” Dr. Toedt said. “I don’t have to worry about the patient not following up with a behavioral health specialist or dietician because we provide the warm hand-off in real-time.”

[Check out the module](#) to read examples of how physicians re-designed their spaces to gain productivity and completely overhaul the patient experience. This module offers continuing medical education credit.

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