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Breaking new ground

Innovative designs of washrooms aim to enhance cleanliness, patient safety and make them more aesthetically appealing

BY TEAM HR

Aesthetics, safety and patient friendliness are some of the defining factors for hospital design, and they remain significant for washroom design as well. From materials used to manage infection control to international standards being adopted to make safe and accessible toilets, washroom design in healthcare facilities has evolved over the years.

Experts opine that the current trend is to make hospital toilets look more residential by using products that one sees at home

such as appealing decorative tiles which are larger, better looking faucets, water closets with concealed tanks, glass shower partitions and others. Says Sanjay Papinazath, director, Skydome Designs, "The aim is to try and make the patient feel more comfortable to contribute to faster recovery. The new materials and products are able to assist infection control and improve patient safety, while making it easier to clean and maintain for housekeeping."

The past decade has seen an enormous effort and emphasis on re-designing patient

1. The current trend is to make hospital toilets look more residential by using products that one sees at home.



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Sanjay Papinazath, director, Skydome Designs



Ajay Gupta executive director, Kgd Architecture

2. Bathroom sizes in hospitals have reduced, while colours are increasingly used on wall surfaces.

bathrooms with an eye on the patients' comfort and safety to prevent falls and infections. Says Anitha Sharma, general manager, marketing, training and technical services, Hansgrohe India, "If we take a close look, the designers are sweeping up a patient-empowered approach that provides an accessible and aesthetically pleasing environment for the patient, family and visitors. En-suite bathrooms are gaining importance as the patient senses privacy, outside noise is buffered, intrusions from housekeeping are minimised and the caregiver's accessibility is increased."

To ensure patient safety, elements like grab bars, anti-skid floor, emergency lighting, nurse call system and toilet door always swinging out are incorporated in washrooms to manage any kind of emergency. A crucial aspect of washroom design is that wheel chair movement is provided for within a patient restroom. Says Ajay Gupta, executive director, Kgd Architecture, "In modern hospitals, we try to have the patient toilet handicap accessible, which means that a patient can roll in to the toilet with a wheel chair and rotate himself or

with some help 360 degrees to operate all the fixtures in the toilet." To facilitate this movement, ample clear space is provided inside for the rotation. The threshold on the flooring is minimal to accommodate a smooth transition in a wheel chair from the room to the toilet. And grab bars assist in mobilisation of the patient. Today, vertical grab bars are being placed on the side walls above the horizontal bars placed next to the toilet fixture for increased patient safety, contrary to the time when one could find only a horizontal grab bar.

Also, projects create separate dry and wet areas. According to Manu Malhotra, director, RSMS Architects, "In our projects, we have been very carefully separating wet and relatively less wet (dry areas) in toilets. Shower areas are tucked in an alcove to avoid any water splashing out in the WC or washbasin area." For instance, Paras Hospital at Patna and HCG in Kanpur have successfully achieved this concept.

Over the years, the shape and size of the bathrooms has changed. Change allows compliant layouts, better area usage, smaller footprint, greater toilet area clearances and more space around toilet fixtures. "A trend of customising the hospital bathroom standards to the needs of adults and children individually can be seen. Patient dressing rooms have started being a part of the bathrooms which have enough space to provide clear floor space to the wheelchair," says Sharma.

Over the years, the bathroom sizes in hospitals have reduced, while colours are increasingly used on wall surfaces. "As a designer, in the past 16 years, I have seen a greater acceptance of aesthetics in washrooms with increase in the use of vinyls stickers and stalls. The promoters do not mind spending on the quality of sanitary fixtures and CP fittings even though they are expensive," says Malhotra. Another changing trend is that coloured fixtures are being replaced by white fixtures. For instance, MEDICS International, Lucknow has

used brighter interiors in toilets and added flowers and art works as a part of rest room without utilising additional space.

The washrooms placement in healthcare facility has moved from the edge of the building to the interiors. The mechanical ventilation has removed the problem of drying and chemical odour of the disinfectant from the facility. "Plumbing contractors, materials and works are a lot better today as compared to the past," says Malhotra.

Today, larger and sliding or double-leaf doors are preferred for patient's ease of access. Single lever basin mixers can be seen all over the back for infection prevention, compared to double handle mixers seen few years ago. "Wall hung toilets for post-surgical patients and floor mounted toilets for bariatric patients are common. Also, anti-slip and large format tiles, back-lit mirrors, fabric shower curtains, towel warmers and anti-microbial surfaces and materials are commonly being used," says Sharma.

To prevent infection, commercial-looking faucets are being replaced by hands-free faucets with a flow restrictor in the spout base to prevent the mixing of air and water so that the water does not get contaminated. "Also, plain spout ends are preferred to eradicate, on the surface areas, building up of debris and minerals which allow germ growth. Sensor operated faucets are also in trend due to the advantage of minimising germs on the surfaces like countertops and less maintenance time spent on broken faucet handles," says Sharma. Digital technology is also being leveraged for patient comfort. The digital thermostatic technology used faucets and showers offer advanced flow control combined with precise temperature control and bacteria resistance.

To control infection, Sanjay suggests installation of tiles with minimum seam, segregating the wet and the dry areas, providing wall hung water closets and not floor mounted which is easier for cleaning, ensuring there is an exhaust while having fresh air supply as well. Using a single lever faucet rather than a



two knob also reduces the possibilities of infection.

Cleanliness is an important part of a hospital. To maintain floor cleanliness, floor-mounted WC use is on the decline and is rarely used. Today, wall mounted WC are more preferred. Toilets are no longer required to be placed at the edge of building lines, as the mechanical ventilation allows them to be flexibly placed in any interior space of the building. Also, there is a greater need for water conserving fixtures and better looking fixtures.

In the coming years, experts say that toilets in hospitals would be more residential and hotel like. Using more modern materials like glass, backlit mirrors, lighting solutions and others will give the bathroom a more aesthetic appeal. Also, healthcare professionals are taking a step ahead to conserve water by realising water-utility costs savings by reducing water consumption. "Hospitals can realise significant savings by upgrading the toilet, shower and faucet technologies. Companies catering to the healthcare sector have come up with various innovative and technologically advanced water friendly bathroom products," says Sharma. **HR**



Manu Malhotra
director, RSMS
Architects



Anitha Sharma,
general manager,
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3. Patient dressing rooms have started being a part of the bathrooms.