Freshen Up Your Practice Waiting Room

By Sue Jacques [5]

From reading material to wall color, keeping your reception area contemporary, clean, and comfortable is one more way to demonstrate that your medical skills are up to date.

Source: Physicians Practice

One of the negative consequences of spending countless hours at your office is that it can lead to a unique type of vision loss — one where you overlook the obviously drab décor that your patients see with startling clarity.

From reading material to wall color, keeping your reception area contemporary, clean, and comfortable is one more way to demonstrate that your medical skills are up to date. Why? If your surroundings are antiquated, patients may deduce that you are, too.

Here are seven budget-minded ways to refresh the atmosphere at your practice:

1. **Entryway.** Step outside your office and look closely at the doorway — as if you were seeing it from a patient's perspective. Note the state of the sidewalk or hallway. Is the entrance clear of obstructions? If there are windows, are they clean? Does the door open easily? If there is a mat or runner on the floor, inspect it to make sure it's in good shape, as it could easily be a tripping hazard. Record your observations and schedule necessary repairs, replacements, and cleaning.

2. **Signage.** When someone is sick or stressed they can easily become confused and distracted. That's why it's important that your office is clearly marked and identifiable. If your office is located in a large building, take a look at the directory in the lobby to ensure that the lettering is accurate and readable. Post your name on the door, and place a sign at the reception desk so visitors know exactly where to check in. Always use respectful language in your signage. "Please turn off cell phones and other devices" is preferable to "CELL PHONES MUST BE OFF!!!

3. **Furnishings.** Be objective when assessing the placement and condition of the seating in your waiting room. Is there a feeling of privacy? Is the furniture well configured? Don't just look at the chairs; sit in them. Are they comfortable? Sturdy? Consider replacing the chairs if they are made of fabric that is tattered or outdated. This is one area that absolutely must be clean, and it is advisable that you select coverings that can be wiped down. Upholstered furniture in a medical office is a haven for germs.

4. **Walls.** A coat of fresh paint can work wonders, and is an affordable way to spruce up your surroundings. Warm tones are considered more calming than bright hues. Ask around — one of your colleagues or staff members may be a budding decorator who would love to research paint colors and organize a staff painting party or schedule a professional painter to come in on a weekend. While you're at it, consider purchasing new art that complements the palette and style you've chosen.

5. **Reading material.** Many medical offices, hospitals, labs, and offices have removed all reading materials from their waiting areas because of the potential for cross-contamination. If you choose to make magazines and pamphlets available, update them regularly, and toss ragged issues in the recycling bin.

6. **Television.** People appreciate having something to occupy them while they wait. Rather than magazines, you may want to consider investing in a flat-screen TV for installation on the wall. Many offices have customized videos that they display on a loop. You can also set the TV to a general station — a home and garden or nature channel. If you regularly see children in your practice, consider creating a unique area for them to watch age-appropriate programming. Like magazines, toys should be avoided because they are difficult to clean.

7. **Restroom.** Your patients expect that a restroom will be available for their use. Whether yours is in the waiting area or down the hall, be absolutely certain that it is well maintained. Provide ample paper supplies, soap, and room freshener. It may be embarrassing for people to approach the reception desk in a crowded waiting room to ask about the location of the washroom, so you may want to post a discreet sign indicating where it is.

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Source URL: http://www.physicianspractice.com/pearls/freshen-your-practice-waiting-room

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