



"WHAT MAKES A HEALING ENVIRONMENT?"

Essay below excerpted from **Healing Design**, an environmental planning booklet prepared for, and funded by, Staten Island University Hospital by Carol Crawford in 2002 at the request of SIUH'S Healing Environments Planning Committee, Maureen Skelton, Director of University Hospice, and Chair.
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Effective healing of the body requires an approach and methodology which integrates body, mind and spirit. It requires the development of a new model of health delivery—a true “Healing Environment”, one that is

patient-focused, value-based, and that integrates the best of western scientific medicine with complementary healing traditions, practices, and approaches. The design and the ambience of the hospital setting also profoundly affects the quality and effectiveness of care by determining the comfort level for care-givers as well as that of patients and visitors. What the care-givers do and what the built environment provides combine as a potent and positive force to counteract the mechanization and impersonality of modern life—factors which have contributed to human illness.

Linked to the design and construction of a true healing environment is a painstaking, conscientious effort to use materials which are safe, derived from sustainable resources, and manufactured in ways which are non-toxic and even beneficial to the planet. There is care taken to insure that the air quality is healthy and that the noise level is carefully controlled. The goal is to design without harm. The effort is driven by giving priority to human issues and human needs, and a firm belief in the power of art and nature to heal—as much by real contact and interaction as by symbolic association.

Conceive a labyrinth, for example: [sample] The concept is mythic, connected to rituals of rebirth and fertility for thousands of years; that built at Chartres Cathedral in France has been walked since the early 13th century for meditative healing. On every Friday, the Chartres Labyrinth pattern, replicated on fabric, is laid out on the floor of the University Hospice’s Conference room, to be walked by visitors and patients; in the Meditative Gardens at High Rock there are two, open to the public as paths to inner peace.

Consider a garden, its color, texture, and above all, its fragrance: both herbal lore and layout figured prominently in early medicine; modern facilities such as [] in California and Staten Island’s own [] specifically incorporate the comforting proximity of nature as a factor in patient therapy

Contemplate the water: why not? We frail animals are made of more than 95% of it. If we become dehydrated, we faint and die. To bring a fountain, a pool, a waterfall, into a healthcare facility seems natural and intuitively healing. The vision and the feel of water is a quintessential mirror of our body’s essence; its sound soothing. All around our hospital is the seashore with its tides ---endlessly echoing the rhythms of life itself. Our horizons, alternating between an urban, manufactured skyline and the infinity marked by sky and ocean, are a means of reaching outside ourselves to be calmed.

Imagine air: soft, moving, fresh, invisible, warmed and sterilized by sunlight, scented not by exhaust fumes and waste, but by growing green things, carrying the promise of fruitful earth, gently massaging our skin---that amazing envelope of sensibility---and filling our minds with associations as it fills our lungs with life-giving oxygen. How immensely exhilarating and refreshing it is to smell the natural air instead of only the innocuous, deadened, recirculated air of a sealed environment.

Envision art instead of machinery and clutter, resting places for your eyes which are not mysterious and frightening, but familiar and engaging.

Anticipate touch and the sense of caring it conveys. Just knowing that care-givers are near at hand, perhaps a family member can instantly restore a feeling of safety and allay fear and anxiety.

According to futurist Russell C. Coile, Jr., author of New Century Healthcare and a member of the Board of Directors of The Center for Health Design, a healing environment is also cost effective. "Those who combine innovative ideas for cost efficiency with healing design will make their own future" economically. "