



CREATING NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS TO ENRICH THE LIVES OF SENIOR'S

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INTRODUCTION

As designers of environments for the aging population, it is our passion and desire to create a quality of life that is safe, dignified and nurturing. The outline below provides key background information and design considerations we use as guidelines to develop enriching environment and support this quality of life.

SOME KEY BACKGROUND FACTS

1. America's older population is living longer and healthier lives
2. Americans 65 and older will reach 39 million in 2010
3. 32 million Americans report some form of disability
4. One in ten people over age 65 have Alzheimer's disease
5. General aging causes deficiencies associated with the five senses

OBJECTIVES

1. To outline important considerations in designing for the aging population
2. To provide technical considerations that aid in the comfort of and consideration of physical limitations in this population
3. To provide aesthetic elements that are safe, multifunctional and have a residential feel
4. To provide elements that promote an environment that is familiar, interactive and focuses on wellness

SUPPORT QUALITY OF LIFE – Design Intentions

- Respect independence and privacy
- Provide clear wayfinding
- Create a safe environment
- Allow options for private and social interaction
- Provide mental and physical stimulation
- Provide access to nature

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

SPACE CONSIDERATIONS:

- Locate bedroom in close proximity to the living room, dining room, and kitchen

- Limit distance needed to walk to living areas
- Encourage socialization

RESIDENCE LOCATION:

- Situate bedroom on the ground floor
- Provide visual and physical access to outdoors to eliminate the sense of “imprisonment”
- Create outdoor spaces that are comfortable and conversational

WAY FINDING

- Use pictures for wayfinding
- Use multiple cues from interior elements such as a themed collection focused on music, sports, gardening, country kitchen, colors, textures, patterns, artwork and lighting
- Create designs to assist residents with dementia

LIGHTING DESIGN

- Many seniors are more affected by light color than intensity
- Provide high level, low glare lighting to eliminate problems with balance and mobility
- Select indirect lighting that reflects from ceiling & walls for best distribution such as sconces, soffit lighting and florescent ceiling fixtures
- Replace old style ballasts in light fixtures with new electronic ballasts to eliminate flickering which can trigger seizures
- Use “full spectrum” lighting (white light similar to noontime lighting) which reduces “sundown syndrome” that can cause agitation and aggression in Alzheimer’s residents
- Provide blue-white light that is soothing – white light makes them more alert, attentive and better functioning – yellow or red causes agitation and anxiety
- Bring in more natural lighting that supplies residents with vitamin D, calcium and can also help with depression

ACOUSTICS

- Loss of hearing is the 3rd most chronic disability in the aging population and can lead to confusion and agitation
- Use acoustical ceiling tile and soft surfaces on flooring & upholstery/window treatments to absorb noise
- Use wireless communication technology to eliminate intercom & paging noise
- Avoid ambient music and noisy paging systems that can lead to agitation

CIRCULATION

- Avoid dead ends (locked doors at ends of corridors) with no obvious choice of where to go
- Provide seating at the end of a corridor to create a destination
- Minimize flooring transitions to eliminate falling
- Ease transition of colors between flooring to avoid disorientation due to harsh contrasts
- Keep circulation paths small to provide a residential feeling

FLOORCOVERING

- **Sheet Vinyl and VCT**
 1. Select resilient flooring designed for durability
 2. Use non-slip surface with a non-reflective finish
 3. Minimize busy patterns
- **Carpeting**
 1. Select carpet to eliminate glare, offer acoustical control and to reduce injuries
 2. Use carpet with a dense-face, moisture barrier, antimicrobial agents and ability to withstand high traffic
 3. Ensure any choice is colorfast and has a sufficient wear warrantee
 4. Ensure that proper cleaning instructions are provided

PAINT AND WALLCOVERING

- Use low VOC paints, non-reflective for wall surfaces and semi-gloss for trim
- Select wallcovering designed to withstand traffic: type 1 medium traffic 10 ounces, type 2 heavy traffic 20 ounces
- Specify patterns appropriate for elderly, low vision and cognitive impairment factors
- Select clear, not grayed or muddy, colors

FURNITURE

- Select furniture that is of proper firmness and height.
- Ensure a variety of seating, size and style

Seating

- Select chairs and sofas with arms and seat height of 18 ½" to 19"
- Select glider rocking chairs with a stable base and locking mechanism
- Select dining chairs that are stable, fit under the table, have arms and are upholstered for comfort

Tables

- Select tables that are standard 29" or 34" for wheelchair accessibility
- Use square or rectangular tables
- Select tables with rounded edges
- Use durable table top material
- Use stable and interference free bases (pedestal base)

FABRICS

- Select fabrics with moisture barriers & antimicrobials to replace vinyl upholstered furniture
- Use Crypton fabrics to create a more residential environment
- Avoid harsh contrasts or patterns
- Avoid large striped patterns as they can appear as bars in motion
- Ensure that fabrics are compliant with fire codes
- Ensure that proper cleaning instructions are provided

WINDOW TREATMENTS

- Select treatments that will allow for light regulation and control glare
- Minimize use of mini blinds or vertical blinds which create disturbing and uneven light patterns
- Consider mesh shades with roll ease mechanisms that have a solid texture and various openness factors
- Select wand drawn draperies for ease of use

ARTWORK

- Use non-glare surfaces
- Secure to the wall for safety
- Select images or scenes that are simple and recognizable
- Place a painted scene or poster on a locked door to help ease frustration
- Choose locale specific images with historic value

SENSORY ELEMENTS: Aroma Therapy

- Create aromas that are familiar, comforting and encourage residents to eat i.e. apple pie

PERSONAL ITEMS

- Create spaces in bed room for personal items with special thought to breakable or non-replaceable items

INTERACTIVE ACCESSORIES

- Provide familiar items from the past to stimulate conversations and interaction with friends, family and caregivers

WELLNESS

- Incorporate brain fitness exercises for mental acuity
- Create spaces that can accommodate both physical exercise and socializing
- Create healing gardens that are interactive
- Provide residential elements

CONCLUSION

Our older population are the heroes from the past; they are a most valuable resource. Our job is to design safe environments that promote dignity, wellness and a quality of life.