

As seen in *Hospital News*

Facility Design: At the Heart of CV Program Marketing

By James Burns, Vice President and Barbara Michaels, Senior Consultant

When thinking about ways to market and brand a cardiovascular program, facility design is not generally considered to be a factor, but indeed it should be. The baby boomer generation, today's healthcare consumers, has high expectations in regard to amenities, service, and overall convenience in all aspects of the service industry. Consequently, the one-stop, super-center approach to *healthcare delivery* has evolved, especially in cardiovascular care.

Gone are the days when a hospital's specialty program, such as cardiac services, can rely on reputation alone. Consumer-friendly facilities can provide a marketing edge and allow programs to differentiate their services from the competition. Savvy healthcare leaders realize that to capture and retain market share, their program needs to focus on the entire customer experience, not just the delivery of clinical care.

It's important to keep in mind that a marketing focus should be directed to *all* users of the program—from the traditional healthcare consumer, the patient, to physicians, administrators, and bedside caregivers. A facility designed for operational efficiency with state-of-the-art technology can serve to attract and retain experienced clinical staff, Cardiologists and other specialists who are in demand. Again, facility design can motivate preference and loyalty for this broad consumer group.

In order to effectively market to the community, whether at a well-established program, or a facility developing new cardiac and vascular services, efforts must be undertaken to evaluate the "front doors" of the facility. How do customers access services? Cardiovascular patients typically access services through the Emergency Room. Are specialty services easy to identify, or do they blend and compete with other hospital departments? Does the patient get their stress test just walking from the parking lot to the cardiac diagnostic lab? What will the customer experience upon entry or exit? These are just some of the questions that need to be considered when evaluating how facility design can positively contribute to community perception by improving the customer experience. Facility design can be a powerful tool for effectively and creatively marketing a program if all components are focused on patient-friendly access and delivery.

"Curb appeal" is another concept that today's hospital administrators are starting to recognize as an integral part of both facility design *and* a sound marketing strategy. Well-designed cardiovascular programs have an easily-identifiable dedicated entrance with a waiting area. Such a layout creates an easy registration process and immediate access to outpatient diagnostic services.

With constant and significant increases in the number of people with cardiovascular disease, having a user-friendly facility that packages all cardiovascular services in a noticeable area will contribute to expanding market share through increased satisfaction and positive community image. Ease-of-entry must be considered for the elderly, patients with chronic disease that have multiple visits, and for underserved populations that are traditionally disenchanting by the complex bureaucracy or processes of healthcare. These access issues can be minimized with effective facility design, which can be promoted along with quality care.

Hospitals increasingly need to recognize the use of facility design as an effective means to differentiate from local competition. Focusing on optimal patient flow through key areas of a CV program is fundamental. In fact, significant restructuring of care delivery to correspond with progressive facility design is fast becoming an essential consideration in the delivery of cost-effective, quality cardiovascular care.

There are several reasons to at least evaluate substantial changes in facility design, even when weighing costs or planning requirements:

- Patient throughput should be streamlined to eliminate transfers and efforts should focus on placing the patient in the right bed. Facility considerations and process improvements go hand-in-hand.
- Technology advances and equipment replacements can mean significant capital investments for organizations. CV programs must try to gauge the timing and the 'winning technology' (i.e. CT vs. MRI) as they plan for future facility designs. The use of flexible space configurations or the use of soft space can be a way to allow for future conversions with less cost.
- Practice advances must be coupled with the creative use of cardiovascular care personnel. Facility design can support cross-training efforts that can allow for a more cost-effective and patient-friendly care delivery model.
- Economic pressures to shorten LOS challenge organizations to creatively apply new and expensive equipment, techniques, devices, pharmaceuticals, and often a greater staff complement to patients from admission through discharge. Facility designs that maximize patient throughput and create ways for staff to work more efficiently and effectively will allow organizations to compete for patients in the market and improve the bottom line of the hospital.
- Finally, patients are demanding a more customer-oriented care process and appreciate the benefits of private rooms and a consistent nursing staff. This typically involves upfront investments in facility, but the benefits can far outweigh the costs as an organization moves to a more patient-centered approach.

Corazon believes that utilizing the Cardiac Universal Bed (CUB) Model is one way to adequately respond to these and also other facility issues that can positively impact marketing. In fact, this component of facility design is a major departure from the traditional recovery model and can differentiate an organization as a progressive provider of cardiovascular services. This innovation is designed to manage cardiovascular surgery and interventional cardiovascular patients in one setting from procedure through discharge, while flexing the staff coverage, equipment, and expertise to match patient acuity. Corazon supports the CUB concept as a means to improve clinical outcomes, reduce operating costs, and enhance patient, family, staff, and physician satisfaction.

CUB rooms are typically designed to minimize the stark, sterile, high-tech appearance of a typical ICU setting. Some room designs resemble attractive hotel suites with high-quality wood paneling, use of natural light, and framed artwork—all to decrease patient anxiety and promote recovery in a comfortable setting. Today, there are fewer than 50 organizations in the country that have made the facility investment and converted to this innovative model, but many more are on the drawing board.

Having a progressive and consumer-friendly facility design communicates strong commitment to the delivery of quality care. It is important to assure that facility design accounts for market potential, the use of emerging technology, and changing clinical practice. However, having all the right components of smart facility design is not the endpoint—its existence must be *marketed* so the community is aware of access to the highest level of care desired.

This will likely take significant investments in time, talent, and dollars, but ideal facility planning requires substantial commitment by an organization and will result in an optimal facility design setting the stage for achieving marketing success for your cardiovascular program.

Jim is a Vice President and Barb is a Senior Consultant with Corazon, a national leader in specialized consulting services for CV program development from strategic business planning through clinical implementation. Corazon is a 2003 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Company. Call 412-364-8200 or visit www.corazon-consulting.com.