



Photo by Johnny Quirin

# Metro Health Hospital

*Wyoming, Michigan*

Building a new hospital from the ground up is a rare opportunity for healthcare designers and planners. Most hospital projects are additions, renovations, or interior reconfigurations.

Those are often big projects in themselves. Yet an entirely new facility begs a tantalizing question: how would you design a brand new hospital? A new hospital offers the opportunity to leverage insights for any healthcare space, new or renovated. From ways to make space part of the healing process, to finding innovative furnishings and employing design strategies for sustainability, the new Metro Health Hospital that opened for the first time in September, 2007 offers plenty of inspiration.

## HISTORY AND SYMPTOMS

Metro Health opened originally in 1942 when a group of physicians formed Grand Rapids Osteopathic Hospital. By 1957, the hospital had a major presence in a residential part of the city.

The hospital's land-locked site was far from the nearest highway, and by the mid-90s the organization was running out of space. A decade ago the hospital decided to look elsewhere for a suitable location. "It was either move and grow, or stay put and wither" as a newspaper editorial put it in The Grand Rapids Press.

But the hospital's board and its CEO, Mike Faas, had an even bigger idea: to build a healthcare village of medical offices, retail shops, condominiums, and parks, with the hospital at its center. The mixed-use development sits on 170 acres just outside of Grand Rapids.

"We don't know of another site in the U.S. that has all of the components that this one offers," says Faas.

The heart of this healthcare village would be a hospital that Metro would call "like none ever before."

To pull it off, Metro collaborated with experienced healthcare partners, including HDR, an architecture and engineering firm based in Omaha, NE, real estate developer Workstage LLC, Grand Rapids, MI, and for evidence-based space and furniture solutions, Nurture by Steelcase.

## DIAGNOSIS

"One of the most important things, from the inception of this project, was Metro's mission to create the best healthcare facility possible. Not only in the services they



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**PATIENT-CENTERED SPACES** Metro's vast expanses of glass provide natural light throughout the hospital, and views of a rooftop garden and this first floor healing garden.

offer, but the environment itself. No toxic chemicals, no VOCs, no off-gassing. All the products that went into it were part of the healing process. In terms of technology, design, and patient care, they wanted to excel in all of those," says Aneetha McLellan, director interior architecture for HDR.

The 6-story, 370,000 sq. ft. hospital is the first LEED certified full-service hospital in the upper Midwest. It's a 208-bed facility with the latest diagnostic and treatment technology, electronic communication between caregivers, and a host of other innovative technologies and equipment. Yet how the physical environment of the hospital incorporates that technology, promotes healing, and welcomes patients, families, physicians and staff, is equally as innovative.

"Their commitment to patient-focused healthcare, the passion, focus and teamwork they brought to this project, and how it supports their mission, are what make this such a special project," says Benjamin Pratt, regional healthcare manager for Nurture.



Photo by Johnny Quirrin

**COMFORTABLE, STYLISH SEATING** in a variety of spaces at Metro provide relaxing waiting environments for family and friends.

## TREATMENT

The list of architectural and furniture elements that contribute to patient-centered care at Metro is an impressive one, ranging from curved hallways and plentiful windows for natural light, to healing gardens and a one-acre rooftop garden (the largest on a hospital in the U.S.) that's visible from 80% of the inpatient rooms. In addition to providing a great view, the garden is an important component in reducing Metro's overall environmental footprint.

The patient rooms are 275 sq. ft. (including a 70 sq. ft. bathroom), twice the size of the rooms in Metro's old facility. The rooms are same-handed, unlike traditional patient rooms that are mirrored, with headwalls back to back. "We made a choice to do that based on safety and standardization. When a nurse walks into a room with an IV pump or a cart, for example, the lines and services are always the same. You don't have to transpose in your head which side something's on,"

says Ingrid Cheslek, vice president of patient care and chief nursing officer.

McLellan says same-handed rooms reduce the chances of error significantly. "They don't have to think which side something's on. It's probably a little more expensive initially, but when you think of the number of errors in patient environments that are life-threatening, it's probably something you're going to see more often."

Instead of built-in patient room footwalls, Metro chose Opus™ casegoods, which include storage, seating and display. "Many times when we design these facilities, we tend to do built-in casework or millwork," says McLellan. "But the patient population is constantly evolving and technology is always changing. We needed this environment to be flexible. The Opus furniture system looks like casework, but the components can be moved and reconfigured. Everything is more flexible."



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**CASEWORK AESTHETIC, BETTER PERFORMANCE** All of Metro's patient rooms feature Opus modular casegoods. Freestanding, flexible, and a broad statement of line, Opus casegoods also work in exam rooms, consultation rooms, hospitality and lounge areas.

With Opus casegoods, technology easily routes behind the cabinets, which are durable enough to hold a large flat screen TV. Shelf and cabinet options provide storage and display. Along with integrated white boards, woodgrain laminate surfaces and other accessories, Opus casegoods provide more options than casework and far more flexibility.

Modular flexibility was also applied to one of the hospital's caregiver stations, built with the flexible platform of Montage® system solutions. "It's very different from traditional millwork," says Cheslek. "The goal is flexibility, finding better ways to support not only the nurses, but also transient workers, such as physicians who come to the caregiver station and work for a short time and then leave. The flexibility gives us an opportunity to see if there's a better way to organize a nursing station."



**COMMAND CENTER** A caregiver station built with modular components offers more flexibility to meet the varied and changing ergonomic, technological, and workstyle needs of care providers.

Nurture also developed a new patient recliner, called Mineral™, for the hospital. "We take a user-based approach to product development, so we said, 'tell us



**ENCOURAGE MOBILITY** The Mineral recliner features a flip down arm that enables patients to get in and out of the chair with ease.

what things you'd wish for in a patient chair," says Alan Rheault, Nurture's director of product development.

Patient rooms at the new Metro Health Hospital are twice the size of rooms in their old facility, but conservation of space still matters. "The footprint for the recliner was an issue, and they wanted to prevent damage to the walls from patients reclining. It also had to be easy to raise and lower the arm, so patients could slide from a wheelchair to the recliner easily."

In just eight weeks, the Nurture development team designed and developed the new recliner. "We made it slightly smaller in scale so it takes up less space and it can be moved easily. We restricted the amount of recline a little and used soft materials on the chair so it won't damage the walls if it presses on them. We also made it really easy for the patient or the care giver to just flip a lever to raise or lower the arm. Plus, there are no pinch points – something that's important for any chair, but especially one in a healthcare environment."

Metro also wanted an efficient and comfortable place for families and friends to relax during the day that could be used as a bed at night.

“They were struggling to put a sleeper in the room, but because of the footprint of a typical sleeper sofa it just took up too much space,” says Rheault.

“The X-tenz™ sleeper sofa was the perfect fit. It takes up the footprint of a loveseat, then opens sideways to make a bed. Plus it’s really easy to open and close.”

At just 40" wide, the X-tenz sleeper works in spaces where there isn’t room to pull a sleep surface out into the room, and makes use of patient room spaces that are often hard to use, such as below windows or between columns. It extends to a sleep surface that’s 80" long by 28" deep.

“The X-tenz sleeper is a very nice product. It allows families to be present, and family participation is a big part of healing,” says Ingrid Cheslek, vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer. “I’ve heard nothing but good things about it.”

Nurture provided furniture not just in clinical spaces, but throughout the hospital. Two staff rooms on every inpatient floor are “multi-use conference spaces with furniture that can accommodate from ten to fifteen people,” says Mary Marks, project manager for the new hospital. Lobby furniture ranges from lounge and casual seating to stools for the coffee bar and task chairs for computer workstations. Lounge chairs for patients, families and friends “are a home run; the surface materials are sharp, just spectacular,” says McLellan.

The overall design and specification of the furniture works seamlessly with the hospital aesthetic. “It doesn’t feel institutional here,” says Marks. “The fabrics, patterns and colors add to that feeling that the hospital isn’t intimidating but welcoming.”

“For all of our needs, including the general lobby spaces, the office spaces, as well as all of the clinical spaces, we’ve come to understand that Nurture by Steelcase is really a one-stop-shopping opportunity for us. To be able to come to a single point person, describe our needs, and then access product throughout the entire company, that is able to meet those needs,” says Carrie Knobloch, vice president of property and construction.

“Nurture’s approach is all about how we can support the space within healthcare environments. The people at Metro were truly interested in elevating the experience for the patient. That allowed us to talk about concepts



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**FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS** Metro made use of hard-to-use space beneath patient room windows with the X-tenz sleeper sofa. Just 40" wide in the closed position, it extends sideways to an 80" long sleep surface.

we've learned from other healthcare projects, share our research and knowledge," says Mike Love, president of Nurture.

Nurture furniture supported Metro's sustainability goals and the hospital's LEED certification. For example, all products were shipped blanket wrapped instead of packaged, to reduce waste. The Montage system solution used in the caregiver station is SCS Indoor Advantage™ Indoor Air Quality Certified. Think® seating is the first product ever to be Cradle to Cradle™ certified. And the list of sustainable products goes on.

"Nurture and Steelcase have a real commitment to environmentally friendly products. They're a leader in environmental furnishings. They take it seriously. They've made an institutional commitment to it. We needed a partner with the same belief system that we have. They started ahead of us and their knowledge base on environmental products and LEED certification was very helpful in leading us," says Faas.

## OUTCOMES

What strikes visitors most upon entering the new Metro hospital is not the technology, or the building's size, or even the fact that it's brand new. It's the feeling in the space.

"The environment is so much different than in other hospitals. It's much brighter, yet the colors that were chosen are soft and very warm. The feeling is very warm, very special. It's so much different from other hospitals," says Cheslek.

"There are places with a nice cozy feel, and other places that are large and spectacular. The minute you walk in you say, 'wow, this is absolutely beautiful,'" says McLellan.

## FLEXIBILITY COMES TO PATIENT ROOMS

Patient care spaces are as varied as the work that goes on in them. Hospitals, clinics, ambulatory care centers – they all have different spaces and different needs. But until recently, no modular furniture line offered a consistent aesthetic and the capabilities that could handle the requirements posed by a major hospital like Metro Health.

That changed in 2006 when Nurture introduced the Opus line of casegoods for healthcare. Opus casegoods offered the convenience of freestanding casegoods with the flexibility of modular furniture. Not surprisingly, it won a Best of NeoCon Gold award that year.

Opus casegoods "look like casework, but the components can be moved and reconfigured. Everything is more flexible," says Aneetha McLellan, director of interior architecture for HDR.

Each of the 208 private rooms at Metro has Opus casegoods. Storage, shelving, integrated seating, closet space, a white board – all provided with the modular casegood solution. It looks like casework, but it has the flexibility to adapt to changing needs at Metro. It's easy to add worksurfaces, sinks, lighting, different storage and display options, even sliding doors and accessory boards. Opus casegoods respond when patient care needs change, practically an ongoing process in hospitals today.

Faas is especially proud of how the first floor welcomes people. Visitors are greeted by a waterfall, large windows and sense that it's easy to find where they need to go. "It feels like a very fine hotel. You feel like you're in a pleasant place, it's not a scary place to be. We have a coffee bar, people can watch large screen TVs, or use the wireless internet access. You can see immediately where you need to go." Even so, a concierge in the lobby greets everyone who comes in the door. There's a reception desk, too.

"The number one comment I hear is about the environment in here. A number of employees have come up to me and told me it's a privilege to work here. The hospital gives them the feeling that they're wanted."

The new Metro Health Hospital helps attract and retain professional staff – by attracting patients, says Faas. "A new facility like this that's comfortable, environmentally friendly, warm and inviting – this kind of workplace is very enticing to an employee or a physician."

"But at the end of the day, a hospital is more and more a consumer-driven choice. People are researching, evaluating services and comparing prices. If an organization like Metro matches up well, we're going to be a provider of choice. It's the patients that will say, 'I don't care where you practice, I'm going to Metro.'"

For more information about Metro Health Hospital, visit [www.metrohealth.net](http://www.metrohealth.net)

## TEAM

Custer Workplace Interiors, Grand Rapids, MI  
 HDR, Omaha, NE  
 Metro Health Hospital, Wyoming, MI  
 Nurture by Steelcase, Grand Rapids, MI  
 Workstage LLC, Grand Rapids, MI

## PRODUCTS

### Casegoods

Opus™ by Nurture

### Desks / Suites

- Payback™ by Turnstone
- Relevant® by Steelcase

### Seating

- Burton™ by Turnstone
- Circa™ by Brayton
- Coupe™ by Brayton
- Enea™ by Brayton
- Leap® by Steelcase
- Mineral™ by Softcare
- Outlook™ Collection by Softcare
- Sawyer™ by Turnstone
- Think® by Steelcase
- Verge™ by Nurture
- X-tenz™ sleeper by Softcare

### System Solutions

- Answer™ by Steelcase
- Montage® by Steelcase

### Tables

- E-table™ by Vecta
- Series 7 Height-Adjustable Table by Details