10 Mistakes to Avoid When Designing Your New Office
Traffic Flow, Dispensary Design And Lighting Among Top Considerations

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Whether a physician is opening a new office or remodeling existing space, it is essential that a number of carefully conceived plans and options are considered. In today’s competitive environment, it is particularly important that physicians consider office plans that meet their needs, create a visual statement, and stay within budget.

A professional office plan designer can assist physicians in making appropriate choices. Using a designer’s plans and the physician’s contractor can save 30% or more compared with buying everything from a fixture company. Additionally, by avoiding the following 10 mistakes, physicians can create an atmosphere that will have a positive direct effect on the overall income and bottom line profits of their practice.

1. Poor traffic flow
The biggest problem in many offices is a plan set up in such a way that the physician has to walk by the waiting area. By being in sight, physicians get interrupted by patient small talk and rapidly get behind schedule. To avoid the appearance of rudeness, floor plans should enable the physician to go from room to room without passing waiting patients. Since most physicians like to walk their patients to the dispensary and do a one-on-one handoff to the optician, they need to be able to get to the dispensary without going through the waiting room. This is one of the best reasons for a circular flow pattern. Not every space lends itself to this, or is square enough to achieve circular flow, but there are other imaginative designs that can be implemented to keep the physician out of view and on task (see Figure 1).

2. Violating the dispensary ‘back-wall principle’
The “back-wall principle” is an essential rule in merchandising. Most physicians want their dispensary to be visible to patients before they step into the office. However, it is important to understand that whatever is on the side walls cannot be seen until a person steps inside the office. Therefore, it is essential to plan an interesting, exciting, or dramatic frame display element for the dispensary back wall. Avoid placing the reception counter and business files here (see Figures 2 and 3).

3. Poor dispensary design
Merely attaching frame bars to walls is no longer an effective display method. Great attention should be paid to every aspect of the dispensary design. Even the smallest dispensaries should have special areas for high-end frames and an adequate selection through the dispensary design.
of midrange frames, all presented in an up-to-date manner. The dispensary should have more pizzazz than the rest of the office, which can be easily achieved through the use of appropriate color and lighting.

4. Inadequate dispensary lighting
Fluorescent lights in the ceiling are fine for general lighting, but frame displays need halogen lighting to bring out their color and sparkle (see Figure 4). Lighting design is more of an art than a science. It involves combining highly complex, technical information with an artist’s eye for visualizing the desired result. Professional advice on your dispensary lighting is valuable.

5. Hot lights over the reception area
Many offices have dropped or lowered ceilings over the reception counter that often have incandescent, recessed can lights. Such lights produce a lot of heat and frequently the staff will turn them off because the heat makes them too uncomfortable. A better solution: compact fluorescent lights, which produce less heat.

6. Reception counter and business office too small
Even the smallest office needs a minimum of two workstations at the front counter, one for check-in and appointments and the other for check-out and payments. Larger offices may have four or five people at the front counter. Extra counter space for equipment such as copy and fax machines, credit card terminal, and printers should be planned from the start. Without proper planning, the front counter becomes a mass of equipment and papers without much actual workspace. The reception counter makes a strong first impression on patients. When it is disorganized, it undermines patient confidence and creates staff frustration.

7. Visible clutter
It is not realistic to expect all work areas to be perfectly neat at all times. Some clutter is unavoidable in a busy office. Work areas should be planned so that patients cannot see into them when walking through the office. Work areas can be concealed with something as simple as a half wall. In some cases, simply placing a work counter at a 90° angle from where patients sit is enough. Address this issue in the early floor plan stage or you may be in for some unpleasant surprises after the office is occupied.

8. Inadequate storage
The ideal type of low-cost general storage is a walk-in closet with adjustable shelves. Practices with a fair amount of contact lens business can benefit from having a second walk-in closet designated for contact lens inventory. If there is no space available for this type of storage, a tall cabinet with adjustable shelves is the next best thing. Another storage solution is to add upper cabinets wherever possible. Storage is an issue that must be addressed in the planning stages because no office ever has too much.

9. Inappropriate flooring choices
It goes without saying that residential grade carpet should never be used in an office setting. However, there are other types of commercial-grade carpeting that should also be avoided. Solid color plush carpet is not a good choice because it shows dirt, stains easily, and its texture gets crushed in heavy traffic areas.

The best choice is a loop-pile commercial-grade carpet with several colors in a small pattern or with a tweed-like texture. These carpets wear like iron, hide dirt and come with a 10-year wear warranty. Carpet should be glued down, not padded. Padded carpet tends to stretch and buckle and needs to be re-stretched to avoid hazards and unsightliness. In front of the reception area, a hard surface like ceramic tile, granite, or laminated flooring like Pergo should be used. Even the best carpet will wear out quickly in that area.

10. Poor seating in waiting areas
Sofas look lovely in a home, but have no place in waiting rooms. Older and disabled patients have difficulty getting up from a soft couch. Additionally, a sofa can take up the space of three or four chairs. Two or three unrelated people will not sit on a sofa together. Individual chairs with sturdy non-upholstered arms are the best choices for waiting rooms. They should have a nicely upholstered back and seat. This type of chair is comfortable and functional.