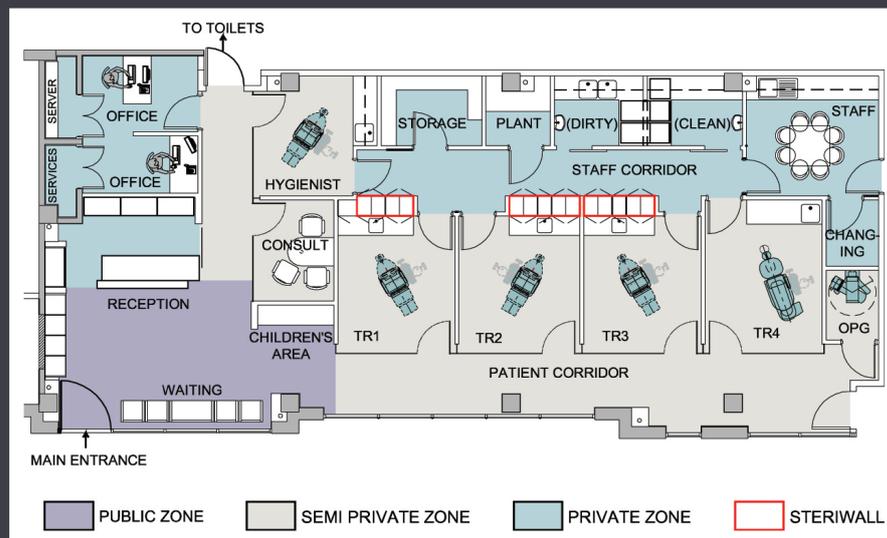


How to... arrive at the optimum layout



Gary Bettis discusses how to make your practice functional and compliant

Most of us spend the better part of our waking life in our work environments. For this reason the spaces in which we work must support our overall health and wellbeing.

Having a well-designed practice is essential. Good design can transform a stiff, boring place of work into a functional and attractive space that effectively addresses the needs of employees as well as patients. It helps allay patient anxiety and gains their confidence.

The best way to achieve the perfect environment is to engage an experienced dental practice designer. They will guide you through the process of obtaining all the necessary statutory approvals and make sure that your practice is compliant as well as beautiful. They will make the most of the available space, which will ultimately impact your practice's bottom line.

A well-designed workplace is more streamlined, productive and motivating – which all contributes to the output of the practice.

Configuring the layout

1. The 'wish list'

The first step for your designer will be to take a detailed brief. You will be asked to prepare a 'wish list' outlining your accommodation requirements and your spatial priorities. Your designer will use this 'wish list' to prepare a scaled layout that considers overall aesthetics and compliance with the relevant healthcare memorandums e.g. HTM 01-05. This layout is a miniature version of your practice in a 2D plan form. It will enable you to examine the workflow and see where each room is located and how they relate to one another.

It is important to be realistic about the space that you have available. Trying to squeeze an additional treatment room into your layout may have a detrimental effect on the practice and how it functions. It may sacrifice the quality and size of the surrounding spaces. Inadequate and cramped facilities may deter some of your patients.

You could perhaps ask your designer to provide 3D sketches or computer models to aid visualisation of the design.

2. Zoning the practice

During the design process your designer will address issues of security, privacy and hygiene by zoning the practice. By defining public, private and semi-private areas, the practice can be more easily controlled and maintained. Patient privacy must be high on your list of priorities and respected at all times. Visitors must not be able to view into private areas such as treatment rooms, consultation areas or staff rooms.

Clinical areas should be situated close to decontamination areas (LDUs) as these are high traffic zones where staff will be moving back and forth quickly and frequently. Patient WCs must be away from front reception and clinical areas. Ideally they should be located near the waiting area for patient comfort. Staff areas can be noisy and should be positioned away from waiting areas, treatment rooms, sedation suites etc.

As well as zoning your practice your designer must consider the sizes of individual rooms in order to achieve the correct spatial balance.

3. The Equality Act 2010

Whatever your plans may be, you are legally required to make the facilities within your practice accessible to the disabled in accordance with the 'The Equality Act 2010' (previously known as 'The Disability Discrimination Act 2005'). During the design process your designer will advise you of your obligations and incorporate disabled facilities within their design.

4. HTM 01-05 compliance

The environment for decontaminating instruments, 'LDU', should be separate from the clinical treatment area.

Your designer must ideally incorporate separate rooms for 'dirty' and 'clean' instruments wherever possible in order to achieve 'best practice'. There may be some instances where 'best practice' is not achievable e.g. where building alterations to certain premises are restricted, such as listed buildings. In such cases the minimum 'essential standard' may be acceptable.

The layout of your decontamination facility must encourage a 'dirty to clean' workflow so that the used instruments are at a lower risk of coming into contact with decontaminated instruments. Wash-hand basins must be incorporated for use by staff at the completion of each stage in the decontamination process.

There should be good storage facilities so that everything can be put away after use.

Although it may seem expensive, purpose-built storage units will help to minimise clutter and enhance administration and sterilisation processes e.g. the 'Steri-wall'.

The 'Steri-wall' creates an optimal environment for the instrument decontamination cycle – which is safely carried out 'behind the scenes'. Dentists place dirty instruments into a double-sided cabinet, ideally out of eyeshot i.e. behind the head of the patient, to be picked up and cleaned from the other side, without having to leave the treatment room – see plan.

Final words

However your building presents itself, every square metre costs money and it is important that you achieve an optimum layout with efficient use of space.

By employing the services of a designer you will be able to visualise the overall project and obtain accurate construction costs before the work is executed. This is the primary reason why designers can save you time and money. Their number one priority will be to ensure your space meets your spatial requirements whilst ensuring that their design complies with all regulatory and legal requirements, protecting the life, health, safety and welfare of occupants.

In the forthcoming series I will discuss how choosing the right decor, furniture, lighting and artwork can help you to create the ultimate practice. [PD](#)

Comments to pd@fmc.co.uk

.....
Gary Bettis is director of Designclinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from private housing, commercial, retail and healthcare. Visit www.designclinic.uk.com for further information.