

How to... furnish your dental practice



Before



After



Gary Bettis explains why image, ergonomics and hygiene must all be taken into account when deciding what furniture to buy for the practice

The impact that seating has on your dental environment should never be underestimated. It plays a significant part in a patient's experience. But the task of properly furnishing your practice can be daunting, especially since a furniture purchase can seem so very final. But if you follow some smart, basic tips, you'll reduce your stress and make the right decisions without panicking.

Types of furniture

There are two types of furniture: fitted and loose. Fitted or bespoke furniture can include reception desks, merchandise displays, and storage units. Loose furniture includes armchairs, side tables, sofas and office desks.

Bespoke furniture allows your designer the opportunity to provide you with a unique design solution. A major advantage of purpose-built furniture is that it makes the most of the available space. Whatever design, the bespoke route allows a choice of numerous materials, colours and finishes.

Making the right decision by getting professional help

If you have already engaged the services of a designer to create a beautiful interior scheme, the most common sense approach would be to let them choose the furniture. Interior designers do not view furniture as add-ons or part of the finishing touches to be considered towards the end of your project. Rather they view furniture as a major contributor to the overall aesthetic and functioning of the practice.

Their role will be to establish what furniture items you need within the practice and source items that will enhance and complement the interior design scheme. They will consider durability, style and design, superior quality, maintenance, guarantee/warranty, safety norms, spare parts, payment and

the contract. They will list the items in a furniture schedule, including finishes, supply and delivery prices.

A benefit of allowing your designer to select your furniture is the opportunity of receiving a discount on the selected items, which may be anything up to 30% off the recommended retail price. Because these businesses handle large-quantity orders, they are usually able to pass the savings on to customers.

Make sure you purchase contract furniture

Whether you are refurbishing, relocating or simply replacing old furniture, be realistic about what you need to spend. You may be tempted to purchase cheaper domestic-grade furniture from Ikea to save you a few pounds but don't forget that, whether NHS or private, you are catering for the general public and as such you have certain obligations to fulfil. The furniture that you use in your practice has to meet a strict set of criteria to meet a number of British Standards. It has to be made with the strength and durability necessary for commercial and institutional applications, ie contract grade.

Typically, contract furniture is used by landlords and letting agents, university halls for student accommodation, hotels, guest houses, offices, bars, restaurants and leisure facilities.

The term 'contract' itself refers to the written agreement between the seller and buyer when the furniture goods are bought. If you would like to know more about the British Standards that affect you email me at gary@designclinic.uk.com and I will send you an information sheet.

Furniture hygiene

Environmental hygiene is an important component of good infection control. Furniture should be clean, coverings intact and in a good state of repair. Chairs/treatment chairs/couches with rips or tears are no longer impervious to contamination and should be replaced.

Upholstered furniture should be wipeable. Unless specially coated, cloth-upholstered furnishings are harder to keep clean and cannot be reliably disinfected. Hence uncoated fabrics are not suitable for use in areas where patient treatment takes place or where contaminated materials are managed (eg, instrument processing area). Vinyl is preferable.



Gary Bettis is architectural director of Designclinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from squat NHS dental practices to high-end private clinics. Visit www.designclinic.uk.com for further information.

Think about your patients and staff

Furniture has a direct impact on health, comfort and efficiency. Workspaces must be ergonomic, ie suited to the human form in order to put less stress on the body. This will enhance the way you and your team operate. Waiting areas must be comfortable and suit the needs of your patients. If you often see children, waiting room furniture that is smaller with rounded edges is highly appropriate. Washable vinyl fabric would be preferable here – perhaps with brighter colours to lift the interior and add a touch of fun. For elderly patients, comfortable chairs with arms will provide good support and allow them to get in and out easily. You may want a combination of furniture designed for children, adults and those with physical disabilities if you see a wide variety of patients.

Think about space and proportion

Your furniture must all physically fit in the space without impeding movement. In order to do this your designer will prepare a scaled plan of premises indicating the size and position of each furniture item. Their priority will be to choose pieces that not only look good but also fit perfectly, taking into account the existing layout of the premises and the proportions of each room.

Be open-minded

Your designer may want to pull together individual one-off pieces to create an eclectic look, reflecting a variety of periods

and styles. Be open-minded. This interesting mix of furniture and accessories is becoming popular, and some of the most stylish interiors have been created using refurbished or overhauled vintage furniture.

Even if you are working on a tight budget, you can still select a few designer or vintage pieces that will complement your existing ordinary furniture. Your designer may be able to find high-end luxury pieces at resale shops, discount outlets or purchase discontinued styles directly from the manufacturer. They can also sometimes find good deals on designer furniture from emerging design houses looking to establish their business; these new manufacturers are often more willing to negotiate prices in order to have their pieces seen and help build their reputation. Taking the extra time to find great deals on upmarket furniture is well worth the effort, as these timeless pieces will lend an air of sophistication and polish to your practice.

Final words

When planning a practice refit or refurbishment furniture should never be an afterthought but should be incorporated into the design. By carefully choosing the right furniture and accessories you can create a positive environment in which your staff can be comfortable, happy, and productive. Tasteful furniture will make a strong first impression and give a sense of reassurance to existing patients. Confident patients are happy patients, and are more likely to come back to you time and again. **PD**