

Wellness Environments Looks To Take Off

Ready to deliver just what the doctor ordered

Most of America's 5,000 hospitals were built in the 1960s and '70s, a late-in-developing consequence of passage of the Hospital Survey and Construction Act, or Hill-Burton Act, inspired by President Harry S. Truman back in 1946. Hill-Burton provided federal grants and loans to thousands of state-based health care providers for infrastructure improvements and to improve the ratio of hospital beds to population.

Simply stated, in 2006, those hospitals are worn out. Enter Nashville-based Wellness Environments, the brainchild of HCA co-founder Thomas Frist Sr. and world-renowned Nashville-based architect Earl Swensson. With an eye toward "building a better hospital room," Wellness Environments designs, manufactures and installs factory-built hospital rooms. With backing from such local health care stalwarts as Harry Jacobson, vice chancellor for health affairs at Vanderbilt University, who brought Vanderbilt in as an investor, Wellness is looking to accelerate its growth in an effort to garner more business from the roughly 50% of U.S. hospitals currently undergoing, or preparing to undergo, some type of construction or renovation.



Similar to the way evidence-based research has transformed the delivery of health care services, evidence-based research drove Wellness to develop turnkey modular patient rooms utilizing "smart" design elements. Whole hospital rooms, ERs and ICU rooms are delivered in containers and can be snapped into place in half the time of traditional construction – and without disrupting ongoing hospital operations. That overcomes a particularly troubling obstacle in rural settings where a large area is often served by a single hospital.

Wellness has also designed rooms to be more therapeutic by replacing gray, drab environments with well-lit, colorful and more interactive rooms that provide a more healing atmosphere for patients and their families. Patients are given more enhanced remote control over room conditions, decreasing non-health-related requests of medical personnel. Cleanup, a serious safety issue in most aging hospitals, is made simpler and more effective with products like seamless countertops. It all yields long-term financial savings that arguably help rooms pay for themselves over time.

Also driving increased interest in Wellness' product line is Medicare's inclination to tie payments to results from consumer surveys gauging patient satisfaction. Bottom line: as competition for patients intensifies worldwide, Wellness Environments stands ready to deliver just what the doctor ordered.



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June 2006

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