

Putting the patient in patient-centered design

Boulder Associates Architects engages cancer patients in hands-on-design for Sutter Medical Foundation's new oncology center.



On a chilly January evening, cancer patients sat around a long conference table sharing stories about their cancer care treatment. At first glance, this may seem like a support group; however, each individual has specifically been asked to participate in this special focus group hosted by Boulder Associates Architects. Its purpose? To gain valuable insight on patient experiences with their Sutter Medical Foundation (SMF) cancer care services, which will then help the 100% healthcare architecture firm design SMF's new cancer center in Roseville.

Jenny Hastings, Principal and Interior Designer at the Boulder Associates' Sacramento office, facilitated the focus group. "We found that everyone was very open about sharing their experiences," says Jenny. "We learned what was most important to them, and how we can help make the oncology center a comforting space for future patients."

The patient focus group was just the first step leading up to an exciting, week-long 3P (people, preparation, process) event where Sutter staff worked side-by-side with the project team to develop full-scale cardboard mock-ups of their new oncology clinic. "The insight we gained from the patient focus group influenced how we built our mock-ups," said Jenny. Together, the 3P team built a reception area, exam room, consultation room, procedure room, blood draw lab, and team work area; all of which were tested, revised, and perfected throughout the week. "We had everyone participate – the administrators, the lab folks, the physicians, the IT folks, and contractors; the full spectrum," said Bev Cole, SMF Oncology Service Line Manager. "Everyone that will engage in some way with the new building participated."

Though Boulder Associates has hosted numerous 3P events in the past, this was the first time patients were involved. Throughout

the week, focus group participants and their loved ones visited the event to help simulate patient visits. After each simulation, the team sat down to discuss what went well and what could be improved. Did the exam room seem too small? Was it too far away from the waiting room? How did the patients and their loved ones feel? “What is great about 3P is it allows for rapid prototyping,” explained Boulder Associates’ Architect Stacey Root. “Because we were using cardboard, we were able to make changes quickly, test them out, and change them again until we got exactly what we wanted.”

“This process gave us design input from patients on a level that we have never reached before.”

Bev Cole, SMF Oncology Service Line Manager

All of the notes, suggestions, and changes from the 3P event will be implemented into the final design of the new oncology center. “Listening to patients and their loved ones, as well as seeing the design from their perspective, allowed us to change the built environment to support cancer patients in the future,” said Jenny. “My husband and I felt so honored to be asked to attend the 3P event. It was a wonderful experience,” said patient Missy Nance. “Focusing on the patient and the family is critical for patient-centered care, and I’m so grateful that Boulder Associates saw that.”



The 3P team developing ideal work flows



Full scale mock-up of an exam room

BREAKDOWN ON THE FIVE DAY 3P EVENT

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish objectives Document and explore current processes (Go to Gemba) Review current metrics Document current state Create alternatives Start mockups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build mockups to simulate flow Simulate the process Evaluate alternatives, choose best 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simulate Kaizen Simulate Reflect and repeat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simulate Kaizen Simulate 3D process Lay out material flow Simulation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize mockups Finalize schematic design Report out