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COMMUNITY-INSPIRED WAITING ROOM DESIGN INTERVENTION EARNS GENERATIVE SPACE AWARD

Sunbrella Sponsored Gensler Research into the Role of End-User Input in the Design Process; Unity Health Care Waiting Room Transformed into Nurturing, Supportive Space

The Unity Health Care waiting room redesign project won the 2018 Generative Space Award, affirming the power of thoughtful design on easing stressful experiences. Global architecture firm Gensler and Washington, D.C.-based Unity Health Care collaborated on a research-based design intervention at Unity's Brentwood health center to test whether community involvement in the design process could result in a design that improves the experience and satisfaction of patients and staff members. Sunbrella® funded the research completed by the Gensler team.

"The most important aspect of the design intervention was how we included health center staff and patients in the design process," said Bonny Slater, a regional health and wellness practice area leader at Gensler. "The resulting design reflects their input on color, pattern and the story of the community, and by weaving these elements into the space, it inherently feels more welcoming to the people who visit and work there. The data we collected supports this community-focused approach to design."



Unity Health Care is the largest federally qualified health center in the Washington, D.C., region. It serves 106,000 patients each year, which amounts to roughly one-fifth of the total city population. Before the design intervention, the waiting room at Unity's Brentwood health center was practical in that people knew how to check in and sit down, but the space was more sterile and utilitarian than comforting and nurturing. The design team hosted community and staff events, surveyed staff and observed people using the waiting room to gather insights into what was important to patients and staff who visit and work at the health center. These insights drove the design process that resulted in a personalized, nurturing and better performing space.

The effect of the personalized space has been positive for both employees and patients. In self-reported post-occupancy surveys, researchers found a 45 percent increase in employee happiness with the addition of

community-inspired art in the waiting area. Patient interviews suggest happiness with the changes, and complaints about wait time decreased by 25 percent.

The designers were curious about materiality and color for the space. Researchers found woven fabric upholstery is preferred over slick “vinyl” upholstery. In a post-occupancy survey, woven fabric upholstery seats were preferred 8 to 1. Although new materials require education and training for staff in regard to care and cleaning, the woven fabric upholstery provides a comfortable, homey feel that can help patients relax. The team chose Sunbrella Contract fabric options for their soft woven quality and because the high-performance fabrics are bleach cleanable without losing vibrancy, which is crucial for a healthcare environment. Balancing the design with practical measures such as sanitation can be a challenge.

Presented annually by The Caritas Project, the Generative Space Award recognizes breakthrough designs that improve health and healthcare.

“The Generative Space Award recognizes projects that sustainably improve the health and well-being of all,” said Gina Wicker, director of architect & design and licensing partnerships at Sunbrella. “Gensler’s dedication to wellness in this project does that not only for the Unity Brentwood health center community, but for other communities that can learn from Gensler’s research. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with such a talented team.”

For more information about Sunbrella Contract upholstery fabrics, visit sunbrellacontract.com.

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The Sunbrella Contract line of fabrics includes two equally impressive contract-grade fabrics: Sunbrella Contract for the hospitality, office and education markets and Sunbrella Contract with Defiance® for the healthcare market, engineered with antimicrobial properties.

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