

Healing Hospital



By: Laurie Eberst

When a new hospital is being planned and built, much of the focus is often placed on how many beds it will house, where each department will be located, how many it will employ and the bottom-line cost of the project.

This is not necessarily the case for Catholic Healthcare West's (CHW) Mercy Gilbert Medical Center in Arizona, which opened its doors in June, 2006. While these considerations were important to the company's plans for the hospital, I and the leadership team worked hard to ensure that the facility was built to reflect, in every way possible, a *healing environment*. One that helps patients feel safe and comfortable, one that reminds staff why they chose healthcare as a line of work. At Mercy Gilbert Medical Center we pride ourselves on being a Healing Hospital™; not only as a healing *facility*, but also as a healing *culture*.

A Healing Hospital™ (a designation awarded by the Baptist Healing Trust, Nashville, Tenn.) goes beyond the glass, bricks and mortar. The Mercy Gilbert Medical Center Healing Hospital™ culture is what sets it apart. The Healing Hospital™ concept includes three key components:

1. A healing *physical* environment
2. The integration of *work design* and *technology*
3. A culture of *Radical Loving Care*

A Healing Physical Environment

Mercy Gilbert conjoined aesthetics with improved performance. We took into consideration not only how we would care for patients, but also how employees, as caregivers, would engage with families. We have learned that providing a loving, compassionate aesthetically pleasing environment promotes healing. True healing environments are constructed in ways that help patients and families cope with the stresses of illness.

I have worked in healthcare for many years, most of them as an RN. But it was during a very personal experience that I came to value a healing environment.

While Mercy Gilbert was under construction during the very early phase, my mother was admitted to a hospital in California for emergency open heart surgery. I spent many hours with her postoperatively supporting her physical as well as emotional wellbeing. I would get her comfortable and positioned for sleep when the intercom would announce that a doctor was on the phone, or a nurse was wanted at the front desk. It wasn't much longer before a loud floor cleaning machine swooped next to her patient room startling her and causing her additional anxiety. All she needed was some sleep. And that was when it hit me. If I influence anything during the construction of Mercy Gilbert, it will be the aesthetics of the hospital and the noise level in patient care areas. I wanted Mercy Gilbert to be free from overhead paging, in-room intercoms, loud machines rolling down hard, long hallways or voices calling to each other at the nurse's station.

For a hospital to promote healing, it needs to provide a quiet environment that allows patients to sleep. Patients' bodies perform the most repair during sleep. Cells regenerate faster during sleep. So why, in the very setting where healing is most needed, do hospitals allow for high levels of noise and sleep deprivation?

Mercy Gilbert promotes a quiet environment. All patient hallways are carpeted. Cleaning machines have a special silencer to avoid startling patients while passing by patient rooms. There is no overhead paging except for emergencies. Nursing staff carries a wireless phone to allow for direct connection with physicians, patients and families. The noise-free environment not only promotes healing for patients, but also has a secondary advantage of promoting a calmer, more stress-free environment for employees and physicians. In healthcare we repeatedly hear that medication errors are often due to distractions. By providing a noise-free environment caregivers are less apt to get distracted, resulting in a reduction of errors.

Integrating Work Design and Technology

A second key component of a Healing Hospital™ is the integration of work design and technology. Working with our designers, we found ways to enable staff to work more efficiently, to provide additional privacy and security for patients and to use technology to promote the healing environment.

Mercy Gilbert was designed with a separate, "back of house" bank of elevators for staff to navigate through the hospital and for patient transfers, providing privacy and security. A patient on his way to radiology, for example, is free from worry that he will run into a neighbor in the elevator. Patients deserve the dignity of preserving their privacy during what is often a stressful time.

Technologically advanced equipment allows Mercy Gilbert not only to provide the very best in healthcare services, but also to expedite processes and results. Patients cared for at Mercy Gilbert can take advantage of the latest digital technology in radiology, pulmonary testing and cardiology. Physicians are able to access test results from their office, which expedites decision making and treatment.

Each patient room features the Skylight system, which provides in-room entertainment. But more importantly, it also provides them with in-room education specific to their needs. The Skylight system provides periodic surveys of our patients to monitor their satisfaction levels. This provides real-time feedback and as a result provides service recovery opportunities if the results are less than satisfactory. Patients can listen to healing music and even a comedy channel to promote laughter – another mechanism to stimulate healing. Live harp music is played in the hospital's main entrance and in various patient

departments throughout the week, providing a calm and relaxing environment for staff, physicians and patients.

A good healing hospital offers highly technical advancements, but is able to integrate the technology into a caring environment delivered by a compassionate staff.

A Culture of Radical Loving Care

The third and most critical component of a Healing Hospital™ is embracing a culture of Radical Loving Care, a philosophy championed by healthcare industry leader Erie Chapman. It is easy to promote a beautiful building, artwork, gardens and technology. But if a hospital lacks the culture of compassionate care and the people committed to that philosophy, you do not have a Healing Hospital. Instead, you have a pretty hospital.

At Mercy Gilbert, our strong culture of compassionate care is based upon the principles of Radical Loving Care. This philosophy takes all healthcare workers back to our roots and reminds us why we first went into healthcare. It promotes the healing of patients through a holistic approach that meets not only the patient's physical needs but also their emotional and spiritual needs.

Mercy Gilbert does not *hire* employees. We *choose* them. We choose our staff based not only on skill level but also based upon their gifts at delivering loving care. Does the employee display a passion for others and desire to go the extra mile to help others? Each new employee at Mercy Gilbert goes through orientation outlining the philosophy of Radical Loving Care and illustrating that every encounter with patients and their families is a sacred encounter.

To remind every caregiver who walks into a patient room of the sacred nature of their work, We have installed "Touch Pads" outside each patient room, engraved with the words "Pause, Reflect, Heal." Employees are trained to stop and touch the pad before crossing the threshold of the room; the words encourage each person who will interact with a patient to take a moment to reflect on their role in helping that patient heal.

Each month our leadership team shares an acknowledgement from a patient about their experience at Mercy Gilbert. All caregivers are included, from the physicians to nurses, radiology technicians to environmental services staff, and each is rewarded and recognized by the hospital's Executive Leadership team. This monthly recognition reinforces the role each individual can play in making a difference in a patient's life.

As healthcare workers, we are invited into the lives of our patients during one of the most stressful times of their life. A Healing Hospital's environment helps to make that stressful time a positive one through compassion and commitment to service and excellence.

Laurie Eberst, RN, MBA is the president and CEO of Mercy Gilbert Medical Center, which in its first two year's of operation was recognized by the Baptist Healing Trust as the number two Healing Hospital in the nation.