

Critical Considerations to Plan Your New Office

Once the decision to lease or purchase new office space has been made, physicians face several considerations in building out this new space. Budget, schedule and functional layout, as well as the implementation of new technology are the obvious ones. There are other less-obvious considerations that a physician's practice may want to include, depending on the circumstances. This important guide to space planning will lay out multiple issues to consider. Using this as a checklist, a physician can incorporate several or all of the considerations in order to achieve maximum performance and experience—from the point of view of the patient, the staff and the physician.

BUDGET

Budget is first and foremost in today's market. The vision of a practice has to be turned into reality—how will this project be financed? Does the vision match the budget? While bankers or financial advisors may be an easy and convenient first choice, there are consultants, architects, real estate advisors and construction firms that will be very willing to help put a dollar amount against the vision.

FUNCTION & OPERATION

The driving concerns behind an office's design are patient care, physician efficiency, and the staff's ability to service patient rooms. For example, the triage area should be up front near the reception area, the lab space in the middle, with patient waiting rooms and exit areas around a loop for optimal flow. The minimization of physician steps should be carefully planned, so that more patients can be seen per hour, and more time can be spent per patient. Backtracking to service patients or visit labs should be minimized or altogether avoided.

PATIENT CONVENIENCE

In any design, the patient as the consumer should be considered. Their experience will keep them coming back if the office is highly visible, finding parking is convenient as well as accessible, and there is ease of access to the building. Most patients want medical offices to be visually pleasing, inviting, and non-institutional. By creating an atmosphere that provides for a positive patient experience, you create the odds that patients will refer other patients.

TECHNOLOGY

To attract top staff, and to minimize patient sign in and exit time, many practices have adopted a paperless approach. Look into the newest and most efficient administrative systems, which include web-based pre-registration and prescriptions. New software packages provide the ability to process claims on line. Savvy physicians have tablet PCs and can easily access patient records and clinical test results immediately, enhancing everyone's experience. IT advisors can investigate the latest and near-future technologies software that can make a practice more effective.

PLANS FOR GROWTH

Typical medical leases can range from 5–15 year terms. Plan NOW for growth. Most physicians find it benefits their practice to remain in a good location for a long term, whether the plan is to buy or lease. Planning should include the addition of patient rooms, staff offices, larger labs and waiting rooms. The space should be flexible enough to grow with the physician—without compromising an ongoing practice should alterations have to be made.

architect or construction firm can help create a schedule which incorporates design time, the number of weeks to obtain a permit, and the lead times for equipment. All of this will precede the actual construction and the inspections necessary before a certificate of occupancy can be obtained. Make sure timelines are realistic and dovetail with lease or purchase documents.

MARKETING

Savvy physicians know that good marketing is one of the keys to success. Being the first in a new office park can often make the difference in the success of a physician's practice. Many practices have realized the value of "branding" the business as a means to market the services the practice offers. The brand is incorporated into the office space and carried through to the marketing materials, website, and signage.

CONCLUSION

Physicians deciding on a first office or next office may want to incorporate the above considerations. Completed projects should match the physician's vision, be within budget, delivered on time, and offer the physician's practice the room to grow while providing an optimal patient experience, a pleasant place for staff to work, and the ability to attract new physician talent. ■

Angela F. Case, Principal, ARC REALTY

Location, Location, Location:
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materials. In some instances a general contractor can receive a demolition and framing permit to help expedite the construction schedule. This is only available in certain jurisdictions.

7 Construction Offices

During the construction phase the general contractor will conduct weekly progress meetings with the project team. These meetings are used to help coordinate all the construction subcontractors, as well as the tenant vendors and suppliers. Medical equipment representatives are strongly encouraged to attend these meetings to help coordinate their equipment with the field and to help eliminate any last minute modifications that may be necessary when the equipment arrives to the construction site. The construction of a typical medical office takes approx 8-12 weeks based on the size and type of practice. ■

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In considering a new office space or relocation we recommend that you allow between 24-34 weeks from when you start the process. Below we have identified a timeline to use as a guide while going through the process.

Schedule

- Consider multiple sites for your office (4 weeks)
- Prepare preliminary space plans (1 week for each location)
- Prepare preliminary budgets (1-2 weeks)
- Final site selection (2 weeks)
- Prepare Construction Documents (6-8 weeks)
- Submit for building permit (4-6 weeks)
- Construction (8-12 weeks)
- Move-in

TIMELINE

A good plan with a target date of when the office comes on line will minimize construction costs, rent on an empty space, and staff inconvenience. An



The Physician's Office Space Guide

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