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How has the atmosphere of nursing homes changed to create a soothing environment for patients?

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What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words, "Nursing Home"? Be honest. My own thoughts flash to a late 1960s, single story structure that is dated both outside and in. Patient rooms are small; in addition, many are double occupancy. Hallways are adequate, but narrow considering all the wheelchair and med-cart traffic moving throughout the facility. The lounge is also small and uninteresting. The only voices you hear come from small televisions brought from home, conversations between staff and patients and periodically, a broadcasted announcement or call for staff. Bottom line, it is neither a very inviting nor comforting setting for patients or their families.

Stereotypical nursing homes are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Between the constant upgrading of rules, regulations and requirements by the Connecticut Department of Health and the competition between healthcare providers, standards have been raised to a new level. Ryders Health Management of Stratford, one of the state's top healthcare providers, recently completed an addition to its Bel-Air Manor facility in Newington, which exemplifies this new high-end, hotel-type nursing facility.

To build on the high quality reputation that Ryders Health Management has been recognized for by the State of Connecticut and other agencies, Dr. Robert Sbriglio and his brother Martin made the commitment to offer the new hotel environment to yet another one of their seven facilities around the state to further separate themselves from other healthcare providers.

The Associated Construction Company of Hartford, in conjunction with Marc A. Petrin, Architect and Innovative Engineering Services, Inc., both of East Haven, and interior design firm of John Watts Associates of East Hartford, brought the Sbriglios' vision to life. Within this new hospitality environment, the owner / design / construction team was able to masterfully integrate all of the nursing and healthcare requirements as stipulated by the State Department of Health and the Town of Newington.

So, how does this new look compare to my earlier flashback of days gone by. Starting with the structure itself, it has a pleasantly imposing entrance similar to the entrance at a high-end hotel. Upon entering the new addition, your senses are flooded with comforting sights and music playing throughout the facility. The interior is very elegant: wallpapers, crown moldings, carpets, wood millwork, and upscale lighting fixtures continue the feeling that you might be in a hotel setting.

Situated below the cupola, the hallway leading to the patient rooms is like the carpeted promenade deck of a cruise ship. At eight feet wide plus four additional feet in width at each patient room door, med-carts and wheelchairs can travel freely and any sterile or institutional feeling has been eliminated. Skylights flood the nurses station with sunlight. Once again, the team has created a hospitable surrounding.

The patient rooms are large, each decorated in different colored wallpaper, all wood cabinets and

simulated wood floors. Each bed station has its own flat-screen cable television on the wall and to keep the noise level down, every bed has its own pillow speaker. Above several beds, there is special lighting called skytiles, which simulate clouds and sky for bed-ridden patients to create a soothing environment.

At the end of the corridor is the Great Room with its high ceiling and large formal lighting fixtures. This is the large room above the entrance. A large grand piano graces this room where special events and performances are held.

The lounge area is the final room located on this floor. This space also has skytiles and features a wood-paneled wall with a fireplace. Through the French doors, patients can access an outside patio when the weather permits.

The lower level, which is reached by elevator, houses all the therapy areas, including physical therapy, a Swimex exercise pool and a training area with full kitchen and bathroom to acclimate patients' return to the performance of household functions and tasks. There is also a beauty salon as looking beautiful is an important part of feeling good and recovering.

There you have it. This is the new look and venue for healthcare. With the baby boomers moving toward the senior years, this upgraded environment is very timely. A respectful and appropriate way to round out our years in this great world of ours. "Hey, Doctor Bob, save me the corner room!"

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