

TODAY'S CHIROPRACTIC

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Making a Lasting *Marriage*

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Designing *for* DCs

By Katie Brown

When it comes to establishing a successful practice, it can take more than first-rate chiropractic education or an outstanding resume and credentials. Often, the practice's physical location and its overall design can have a profound effect on attracting and retaining patients. Everyone who steps into the office is impacted by various aspects of the design, from the color scheme, to the maneuverability of the layout, to the lighting techniques.

"Chiropractors understand that they have to stand out and that their space is part of how they are going to stand out," says Carolyn Boldt, vice president and director of design for CrossFields, a building and design firm that has worked on almost all of the design projects on the Life University campus since 2003. "As a patient comes into the space, he or she forms an opinion immediately—part of it is the chiropractor, part of it is the staff and part of it is the space itself."

A PROFESSIONAL'S PRECISION

DCs need to begin the process by pinpointing the type of practice they are seeking based on their personal styles of care and viewpoints. Since the type of project can vary from a few minimal upgrades in a rented office space to a full-blown construction project from the ground up, chiropractors can be left weary about how to tackle the renovation. Because of this, the execution is often left to professional designers and architects, who will be able to expedite any construction and delays that may interfere with the chiropractor's primary responsibility—to care for his or her patients.

"Don't be afraid to hire a professional, because a professional can cut to the chase," says Boldt. "They may cost [chiropractors] money, but the money spent on a professional will save time and energy, keeping them focused on the practice while going through the process. The

results can increase a chiropractor's profitability through efficiency and patient retention."

Phil Williams, owner of Pulice Williams Architects, an architectural and interior design firm specializing in medical and health care offices, notes that it's important for chiropractors, or anyone becoming involved in a design or renovation project, to carefully select the design professional or firm based on their previous design work and qualifications, as opposed to who has the lowest fees. "From my experience, some clients select professionals based upon the lowest fees," Williams says. "As the old saying goes, 'You get what you pay for.'"

ESTABLISHING A VISION

Upon meeting her clients, Boldt says she begins every project with a process called "programming," which is a focused, in-depth interview to determine the chiropractor's requirements

for the space. This initial discussion will establish the chiropractor's physical and functional needs, the desired experience and atmosphere, budget and time frame.

For chiropractors, establishing a practice vision is one of the most important steps in the process. This can include everything from the number of patients seen each week, to available services like X-rays, to the types of techniques used. Once decided, a design firm can take into account the chiropractor's quantifiable factors (types of spaces and activities taking place in each space) and experiential factors (intended feeling and atmosphere) to create a cohesive design plan.

CONSIDER THE ADJUSTING AREA

One commonly discussed design decision is the type of adjusting space—open, semi-open or closed. According to Boldt, the type of practice often dictates the adjusting space. Open plans tend to work best for high-volume practices that seek interaction between patients, while closed rooms work best for practices that require longer time with patients, patient privacy and sound/light control.

However, practices don't have to solely be open or closed. Pulice Williams Architects recently completed two chiropractic office renovations at Osteo Relief Institute in Edgewater, N.J., which included semi-private physical therapy rooms with sliding curtains, and Ishitani Chiropractic in Fort Lee, N.J., which implemented an open floor plan in the stimulation room and closed rooms for private care.

For Drs. Peter Kevorkian and Patti Giuliano of Westwood Family Chiropractic in Westwood, Mass., when it came time to renovate their home office practice, which at the time included four closed adjusting rooms, creating an open concept space spoke to the type of practice they wanted to run. After enlisting the expertise of two patients—an interior designer and an architect—Kevorkian and Giuliano were able to transform their home office practice into a more homey, comfortable environment. "We decided to tear down the walls, and [the practice] became more non-therapeutic," Kevorkian says. "People were there less for a problem, but more for their well-being."

Kevorkian notes that the open concept office, which also includes one private room for patients who want to discuss personal issues, has created a sense of community among his patients. "People became more engaged when we

took down the walls," he says. "The educational process is so much more powerful because they see me working while they are waiting."

Boldt, who, aside from her design work on Life University's campus, has specialized in chiropractic offices and has designed multiple clinics, says that for chiropractors seeking a sense of community within their own practices, open or semi-open plans will give them the opportunity to educate their patients, develop loyalty and create a sense of trust and comfort.



Opposite page: The Sid E. and Nell K. Williams Library lobby at Life University was designed by CrossFields. This page, Osteo Relief Institute (left) and Ishitani Chiropractic by Pulice Williams Architects.

DIVE INTO THE DESIGN

If a complete design renovation or remodel seems like a daunting project, both monetarily and time-wise, a few simple fixes, like new artwork, fresh paint or updated furniture, may be the right course of action. "Sometimes, a face-lift is all that is necessary to freshen up a tired-looking office space," Williams says.

However, for the more involved architectural design projects, which could include expansions, reconfigurations or even complete demolition, a design professional is suggested. "The actual process of opening an office—going through the planning, the pricing and the construction—is an event in that it has a beginning and an end. Once it is over, the chiropractor won't have to go through it again for some time," says Boldt, who points out that chiropractors typically renovate or remodel

their practices every seven to 10 years. "Chiropractors are pioneers, which is why we love to work with them, and they can do many things themselves. That's great, but sometimes it helps to have someone else who knows what's going on to save the learning effort and potentially costly and timely mistakes."

The remodeling and renovation process shouldn't be an overwhelming event, especially when placed in the control of design and architecture professionals. Williams encourages



hesitant chiropractors to believe in the process and understand that the professional will have the chiropractor's best interest in mind. "Being apprehensive is human nature," Williams says. "Change is good when the process is thought out by creative people who alter your office space with a better design experience."

In the end, while a successful practice is born through the practice vision and expertise of the chiropractor, establishing a practice identity through the look, feel and design of the practice space will enhance the chiropractic experience for all, starting with that ever-important first impression. "Remodeling and redesigning an office is a smart business investment that will enhance [a chiropractor's] office brand and identity," Williams says. "A patient's first impression will always determine if you made the correct decision."

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