



# Designing A Healing Environment In An Intensive Setting



At one time in our lives, someone close to us has been in a car accident, undergone a life-threatening operation, or contracted a serious illness requiring the services found in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or Coronary Care Unit (CCU). An ICU/CCU can be a very intimidating place for patients and families already worried about the outcome of the patient's condition.

SSOE helped St. John Macomb Hospital change that perception. Keeping in mind the key qualities desired by administration, nursing and physicians, SSOE designed a space that is warm, nonthreatening, encourages healing and minimizes stress for patients, families and staff.

The new 22,500-sq. ft. ICU/CCU is composed of 29 beds arranged in four pods with a nursing station in the middle of each. Of the 29 beds, 17 are ICU beds and 12 are stepdown beds. Besides the four main nursing stations, there are 11 satellite workstations conveniently located between each room. The two-seat work counter allows one or two nurses to closely monitor one or two patients, depending on acuity.

This improved line of sight for the staff ensures that patient rooms are directly visible from all main and satellite nursing stations. It enhances one-on-one care and places the nurses closer to their patients.





Photography by Cris Burkhalter

Additionally, being able to see their nurse is reassuring and calming to patients and family members. To break up the typical hospital ICU/CCU corridor (with panel after panel of aluminum and glass), the nursing workstations are recessed and accented with arched soffits, highlighted with wood trim. Lighting was provided that offers different levels and qualities, including corridor wall sconces.


Numerous studies have shown that improving a patient's physical surroundings has a positive impact on the body's ability to heal. Color, lighting, furnishings and spatial design are the main elements in this concept. During design, a full-scale mock-up of the room was constructed to test space and "workability." As a result, the average 15' x 18.5' patient room, with its advanced technology and equipment, is warmed with faux wood flooring and soft, neutral colors on the walls. Cubicle curtains and window treatments contain accents of calm blues and muted warm reds to keep the room alive with interest. Comfortable chairs are provided for family members and visitors.

The choice of handwash sink was carefully selected to be non-clinical (but highly functional) while the location of medical gas service columns permits multiple bed placements for care flexibility.

Though the stepdown rooms are large enough to function as ICUs, the main difference between them is a private toilet and shower in the step-downs and a toilet room in the ICUs. The decision to provide individual toilet rooms has been a long-term debate between ICU designers, primarily due to the inability of most patients to leave their bed. SSOE added toilets in this unit to provide flexibility, but minus a "front wall." In its place, a curtain was installed to allow privacy and easier access to the toilet for patients connected to multiple IVs.

Health care professionals feel that natural light is another important part of the recovery process. Therefore, each patient room in the ICU/CCU has a large window that helps the patient with day/night sensory orientation.

Patient and staff needs were only a part of the design process; family and visitor needs were considered, too. Even though all access to the ICU/CCU is controlled, the reception area is welcoming to family and visitors. Extensive use of wood and wood accents throughout the reception and elevator areas conveys a warm sentiment.

SSOE also replaced the traditional single, large and impersonal waiting room. Featuring colors that coordinate with the clinical areas, SSOE designed several intimate seating areas that allow family members to be near to and support one another. Open wood grilles divide the seating areas to avoid a closed-in atmosphere. 



## Project Highlights

- Family consultation room
- Respiratory Therapy support space
- Physician digital and film X-ray viewing area
- Work and storage areas
- Nourishment and medication preparation areas

