

A NEW HORIZON

SickKids takes holistic approach to healthcare workplace design

By Patrick Fejér

The healthcare design landscape is constantly evolving, extending far beyond the walls of the patient room and into the workplace setting. In many ways, today's healthcare institutions are responding to the same challenges as commercial facilities: staff burnout, employee health and well-being, siloed teams, lack of collaboration space and the impact of technology on the workplace. The conversation around design is shifting to a more holistic lens, bringing staff's space needs to the forefront.

There is much to be learned from the innovative workplace design strategies utilized in other sectors where traditional role-based spaces are eschewed for collaborative, team-based environments that support cross-disciplinary interaction and spontaneous innovation. In a hyper-connected world dominated by disruptive change, and a labour pool with different expectations of their work area than previous generations', new ways of working continue to emerge. Designers are responding through the creation of future flexible spaces to address today's

modern realities while bridging multi-generational needs. For the first time in history, there are four age groups in the workforce — baby boomers, gen X, millennials and the first of generation Z.

Contextualizing this within healthcare workplace design means shifting the focus to the specific needs of staff to uncover operational efficiencies and improve workflow. Transforming the workplace into a smart, flexible, adaptable, integrated and operationally efficient support system is increasingly becoming a focal point in the conversation.



Renderings courtesy B+H Architects.

As a world-leading hospital for pediatric health sciences, the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) is setting a precedent in healthcare workplace design with the construction of the new Patient Support Centre (PSC).

Anchored firmly in the centre of the hospital campus in downtown Toronto, the 22-storey PSC will house education, simulation and core administrative services in a modern, technology-enabled and sustainable building. It will establish a critical link between clinical care, learning and discovery across SickKids

for more than 3,000 medical professionals, management and support staff.

The PSC goes beyond traditional healthcare workplace design by bringing together medical expertise and support staff currently dispersed across offices within Toronto's Discovery District into a central campus hub for convergence and collaboration. Co-locating workspaces for staff from different disciplines under one roof will make it easier for colleagues to meet for planned and spontaneous knowledge sharing and problem solving.

Leveraging the latest thinking in efficient and healthy workplace design, the PSC will provide a variety of inspiring spaces to meet. The new tower will also be home to hospital administration, including (but not limited to) legal services, financial services, human resources and information technology, fostering a strong sense of community for the organization's culture.

To help bring the project concept to life, a series of collaborative visioning and planning sessions were held with the SickKids team, engaging all levels



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of hospital staff through facilitated workshops and tailored tools to generate insight and help inform how to best translate spatial solutions that support the healthcare facility's desired culture.

The PSC's first floor lobby will blur the boundary between indoors and out. A

playful yet purpose-built facade will provide a necessary transparent exterior to foster increased connectivity with hospital staff and SickKids patients, who will be able to see into the building's interior from some inpatient rooms in the neighbouring atrium building. The

inner workings of the building are exposed through an interconnected, multi-coloured staircase, channelling intuitive wayfinding and recognizable branding while revealing a public glimpse of the facility in action. A series of coloured horizontal fins further animates the viewer's experience, and at the same time provides shading and optimizes thermal performance on the interior.

The lower publicly accessible floors will include a learning concourse that will feature a simulation centre for hands-on teaching, as well as a library and conference centre.

An enclosed pedestrian bridge will connect the hospital's main atrium to the PSC and Peter Gilgan Centre for Research and Learning, emphasizing the critical relationship between clinical care, learning and research across the campus.

The PSC is targeting LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold certification. The building will also comply with the Toronto Green Standard, a two-tier set of mandatory and volunteer performance standards for new development projects, while exploring the option of compliance with WELL, an architectural benchmark focused exclusively on human health and wellness to improve sustainability.

The PSC officially broke ground in October 2019, and is the first phase of SickKids' campus redevelopment plan, Project Horizon, which aims to build an inspired hospital of the future, transform care delivery, and empower patients and families to be partners in their care. ■

Patrick Fejér is a senior design principal at B+H Architects, the design architect and prime consultant for the Hospital for Sick Children's new Patient Support Centre. Patrick has more than 20 years' experience in mixed-use building, office and hospitality design for a diverse range of high-profile urban developments in Toronto and around the world.