



Making Your Breakroom More Comfortable

Points to consider in your breakroom design

By Carrie Rossenfeld

Chances are, you've spent far more time thinking about the design of your reception area and exam rooms than about how your breakroom looks. It's natural to want your patients to be pleased with what they see, but what about your staff? The breakroom is the one place in your office where they can go to relax, unwind and recharge; since you expect your employees to give you their best effort, why not give them a comfortable, attractive breakroom that shows them you care.

What a comfortable breakroom looks like

"While most physicians are cognizant of the need for a staff room, the reality is that the staff room is usually small and tight and may double as a storeroom," say Terrie Kurrasch, senior strategist and planner, and Lynn Drover, senior associate, at Ratcliff, an in Emeryville, Calif.-based firm that provides design services to healthcare businesses.

Your breakroom may even be used for vendor presentations and employee training, so it has to be both functional and attractive. Aside from your basic table and chairs, coffeepot, microwave, sink and refrigerator, here's what to address to make your breakroom more inviting:

Lighting

Ideally, your breakroom would have a window to let in as much natural light as possible. If it doesn't, look into light bulbs that bring a "sunlight feel" into the room, says Deidre Gatta of Artistic Designs by Deidre in Slingerlands, N.Y.

In addition to a main light source over any gathering and work areas, include lighting over tables, under wall cabinets, and over and under counters. Add a backsplash of tile, and incorporate some glass into the design to help reflect light into spaces with under-cabinet lighting. Lighted murals that appear to be windows, and possibly a "wall washer" to highlight a framed poster are other good choices, says Cynthia Mills of DTE Interiors in Longview, Texas.

Color

Cool colors help lower blood pressure, body temperature and heart rate, says DeAnna Radaj of Bante Design LLC in Milwaukee. But warm, rich colors can also promote positive feelings in staff members, says designer Elaine Williamson of Elaine Williamson Design in Frisco, Texas.

Colors should be clear (not too muted), and selection should depend on the amount of light in the room as well as any existing conditions such as flooring.

You want colors to be soothing and yet rejuvenating, not jarring. Avoid paint in green-toned yellows since they can interact poorly with skin tone and can make people look ill. Finally, choose a shade or two lighter than the rest of the office if the breakroom is smaller than the other rooms, or a shade or two darker if the breakroom is larger.

Flooring

Carpet tiles, engineered wood flooring or tile are good breakroom options. Rugs are also appropriate to soften the floors if carpet has not been chosen as the primary flooring.

Furniture

Choose seating such as chairs with ottomans or loungers that are practical, comfortable, ergonomic and still aesthetically pleasing, suggests Ken L. Bowman, interior design manager of Earl Swensson Associates in Nashville.

Cleanable fabrics and a dining table are recommended. Think about getting a daybed or sofa if you offer late hours, have staff on-call for emergencies or are located in an area where staff may be stranded due frequent inclement weather. Stackable chairs and a separate table are smart for vendor presentations, meetings and employee training.

Perks

Depending on your staff's needs and what is demanded of them, you may want to include a reading center with magazines and books, a beverage center, a flat-screen television, headphones or a computer area with PC, Wi-Fi for laptops and a place to plug in an iPod or MP3 player. A smart but efficient kitchen area or even a small laundry area if your practice goes through volumes of towels may also make sense for you, suggests Leslie Markman-Stern of Leslie M. Stern Design, Ltd.

Comfort without breaking the budget

"Since it isn't a revenue-generator, the breakroom is typically furnished inexpensively," says Leslie Gray, account manager for Smith & Schaefer, Inc. in Cincinnati.

Fortunately, it doesn't take a lot of money to make a breakroom look sensational. In many cases, you can use the same materials as you're using in the rest of the office and just change an element or two to give the room a unique feel.

For example, if you're purchasing cabinetry for your exam rooms and nurse's station, you can buy extra of the same type and just change the knobs to make the room feel less clinical. The same is true for flooring – it can be laid out in a different pattern or decorated with throw rugs to distinguish the breakroom from the other office



The walls in this breakroom at Highland Pines in Longview, Texas, feature lighted windows and nature scenes. The room was designed by DTE Interiors.

areas.

Gatta recommends color blocking for an inexpensive way to add a visual stimulant. Add the accent color to the wall closest to the eating area. For the other three walls, choose a neutral tone that works with the rest of the office color scheme.

"It typically does not involve much of the budget to redesign or build in a great breakroom," says Williamson. "We usually spend about \$6,000 in total including furnishings."

Mills suggests allocating 5 percent to 8 percent of your design budget on the breakroom to create a comfortable space that allows staff to relax enough to come back to work focused and efficient.