KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To review the existing literature concerning interior designs geared towards enhancing the quality of care for elderly patient populations, and to discuss new possibilities for enhancing elderly healthcare environments.

Designing interiors to mitigate physical and cognitive deficits related to aging and to promote longevity in older adults: A review

Key Concepts/Context

As the global population of elderly people increases, healthcare providers and designers alike are faced with the question of how to continually optimize the design of healthcare environments so that a high quality of life is upheld. Designing physical spaces for the elderly requires a unique approach since high degrees of safety, flexibility, and overall appeal are necessary for the environment to be an effective healthcare space. This paper reviews a broad range of research concerning elderly patient care and living environments in order to highlight modern issues as well as potential solutions and best practices for improving the spaces inhabited by elderly healthcare patients.

Methods

For this literature review, the authors used the U.S Census' definition of elderly adults, which includes all individuals over 65 years of age. All literature reviewed was considered "recently published", meaning the studies were generally published after the year 2000. Findings were organized into three primary categories: 1) Impact of Geographical, Social, and Cultural Factors on Aging, 2) Influence of Interior Design Elements on Well-being and Longevity of Older Adults, 3) New Directions in Interior Design for Older Adults.

Findings

Design features that support relaxation and spontaneous social interaction among patients were found to be highly beneficial among elderly patient populations.
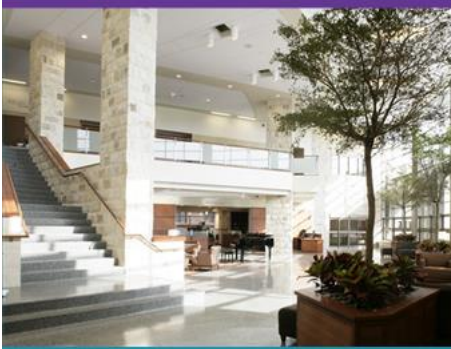
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Especially beneficial were designs that allow for access to natural environments, daylight, and a variety of other sensory stimulations that could help keep specific parts of the brain and body active. Designing elderly healthcare spaces to be as easily navigable as possible is of high importance due to the possibility of patients losing some degree of psychological capacity during their stay in a given healthcare environment. Some studies suggest that a high degree of surface color contrasts may help with general visibility among elderly patients. Interior temperature guidelines varied widely depending on geographical locations and patient preferences. Suggestions for future designs include the introduction of cutting-edge, internet-equipped technology into as many healthcare facets as possible. This technology could help with overseeing and controlling a wide variety of variables including temperature, lighting, and navigational tools.

Limitations

All findings and suggestions outlined in this study were derived from previously-published research; the authors did not conduct any field observations or gather any novel quantitative or qualitative data. Therefore all recommendations and conclusions come from the authors' interpretations of previous research.

Design Implications

Recent studies indicate that designers can play an active role in positively influencing elderly patient care by considering a myriad of care environment variables, such as: indoor temperatures and lighting fixtures, surface color contrasts, patient access to natural environments, daylight, social settings, and the implementation of cutting-edge technology that provides access to the Internet of Things (IoT). Designers might consider how a given elderly care facility's geographic and cultural context would factor into all design decisions, since research shows that these variables can play a large role in patient satisfaction and overall experience.