



Repurposing Acute Care Space: Success Requires Early Planning and the Right Experts

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Hospitals today stand at a crossroads that few anticipated a decade or two ago. Thanks to the latest technological innovations, greater emphasis on managing populations through preventative care and consumer desire for convenience, procedures and conditions that once necessitated lengthy hospitalizations may now require only outpatient visits or shorter hospital stays. With inpatient demand declining, health system leaders must rethink the way they deliver care.

“Many hospitals are not doing the same volume of major inpatient procedures they were 10 years ago. As a result, they have the opportunity to repurpose an operating room into a hybrid suite or an ICU into a med/surg room. It’s about understanding what your community’s priorities are and responding to them,” says Theresa Brigden, LEED AP, associate principal, facilities, capital and construction advisory solutions for Vizient.

Determining how to repurpose an acute care space requires a careful assessment. Below are some key steps in the process.

Plan early and often

Savvy health care providers examine anticipated market needs five to 10 years down the road. They are looking to build flexibility into their acute care facilities, such as modular walls or ceilings, to enable them to make adjustments in a cost effective way in the future.

Discussions about building infrastructure needs should take place during capital budget planning and master planning meetings. Dialogue should include evaluation of the infrastructure currently in place and how to respond to future health care needs for the community. Capital equipment should also be a part of these conversations. For larger pieces of equipment that are nearing end of life, it might make better sense to replace them early rather than incur moving expenses just to replace them a year later.

“Master planning and capital improvements should be a part of every C-suite discussion and board meeting, quite frankly, whether it’s a 5-minute discussion or a half-day workshop. It’s just that important,” emphasizes Brigden.

Assemble a team

A major hospital repositioning must involve the right stakeholders. Important participants in the planning process include the CEO, CFO, facilities leaders, nursing directors, as well as planning, design and construction leaders.

According to Brigden, health systems sometimes fail to include facilities leaders in the planning process, adding that they can provide very valuable information. “These are the people who are going to maintain the facilities and ensure they operate efficiently. Having the right stakeholders at the table is going to save a lot of headaches and heartaches down the road,” she says.

Given the many complexities in master planning and construction, hospitals should leverage industry experts early in the planning process.

External consultants can help assess the competitive landscape, market share and community demographics in order to meet the future needs and challenges of a health system’s populations. Once the initial market assessment is complete, Lean-led design experts can help optimize existing space and ensure the proposed changes work within the framework of the building.

Brigden adds that health systems are going to get a larger bang for the buck if they bring the right industry resources to the table to determine the future of their facility rather than trying to make these decisions themselves. “While your providers can add valuable insight into certain aspects of space design, bringing in the right expertise will help ensure your decisions are a smart, strategic investment.”

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Theresa Brigden, LEED AP
Associate Principal, Facilities, Capital and Construction Advisory Solutions
Vizient, Inc.

Repurpose with a purpose

While revamping a legacy facility may seem like the most efficient route, this may not always be the best decision. Renovating an aging facility can become cost prohibitive if asbestos abatement or major structural work is required. In these situations, it may be better to tear down and rebuild or relocate.

There are also infection control considerations when renovating an acute care space that will remain open for patient care. “Hiring a contractor with health care experience who understands how to protect patient care spaces during construction is important,” says Brigden.

Further, a hospital that was constructed 50 years ago may not be ideally located based on current demographics and market competition. When deciding whether to repurpose, build or expand, planned services should match a hospital’s demographics and meet the needs of the area. And before jumping on board the latest health care construction trend, whether it’s opening an urgent care center or stand-alone pharmacy, ensure the proposed changes make sense for your specific community.

Finding the right partner

Are you considering repurposing space in one of your acute care facilities? Partnering with facilities and construction advisors with extensive industry experience can support your organization in meeting the needs of patients and the community years down the road.

For more information about how Vizient [experts in facilities, capital and construction](#) can help plan an upcoming construction project, contact us today.

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