



# General Practice Building Design and Access

When designing a practice, it is important to consider how to make patients and visitors feel safe, welcome and comfortable.

Ideally, the overall design of a general practice will provide for:

- Patient and staff safety;
- Patient access;
- Financial viability and sustainability; and
- Personal wellbeing and satisfaction.

## Safety

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) recommends implementing practical strategies to assist general practices to appropriately minimise risks of violence and create a safe environment for patients and staff.

For more information on this, see the resource:

- General Practice – A safe place: A guide for the prevention and management of patient-initiated violence  
<http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/business/tools/safetyprivacy/gpsafeplace/>

## Entrance

The entrance to a practice should be warm and welcoming and include considerations for parents with prams, people with low mobility and weakness from illness or a physical disability.

Ensure the entrance is signposted and well lit, particularly at night, and that the area provides shelter from the weather to wait for transport and

is a space to shake off the rain, put down an umbrella, remove coats, etc.

## Reception

A safe, welcoming and practical reception area will be situated where patients can be immediately received by the reception team, but is also central so that the patient will automatically pass by on their exit. The area should include:

- Wide and high counter tops, to increase difficulty for a person to lean over into the counter and/or jump the counter. This will also provide an increased safe distance to reduce cross infection between patients and staff.
- A private area or 'back office' which will give staff a quiet place to work on administration duties and make confidential or sensitive phone calls to patients, laboratories, hospitals and specialists, etc.
- Computer monitors that are positioned so that patient records and other confidential information are not visible to anybody but the appropriate members of the practice team behind the counter. Timed screen savers and automatic log outs will also aid in reducing the risk of a breach of privacy.
- Ergonomic design of desks, chairs, filing cabinets and shelving coupled with staff training to reduce incidents of workplace injury, repetitive strain and fatigue.

## Waiting room

Remembering that your patients are likely to be unwell, the patient waiting area ought to be a private, quiet and calming area. Take into consideration:

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- **Auditory privacy:** music or a television playing softly may reduce the sound of voices from reception, corridor discussions and other patients in the waiting room.
- **Staff and patient safety:** can your reception team see all the patients in the waiting room easily? Patients should be observed as they may require immediate medical assistance (eg seizures, vomiting or chest pains). Identify drug seeking or mentally ill patients and monitor suspicious behaviour.
- **Infection control:** can the area be easily cleaned? Chairs, floors, tables and other surfaces should be built of durable, nonporous material such as plastic or intact lacquered wood suitable for routine and scheduled environmental cleaning to reduce risk of infection transmission.
- **Patient initiated violence:** ensure the area contains no objects that could easily be thrown or used as weapons (against staff and patients). Place posters in the area publicising the practice 'zero tolerance' policy to violent behaviour.
- **Patient comfort:** a range of chairs with different heights, widths, arm rests or lifts to assist patients with mobility issues to sit and stand easily.
- **Patient distress:** is there somewhere private for people who are distressed; crying, with migraine; needing to lie down; or to calm an upset child? These patients may be observed to be uncomfortable by reception staff and offered another area.
- **Health promotion reading material:** display a notice board and pamphlet rack and include brochures for various health promotion activities, preventative care, symptoms of disease and community care organisations.
- **Practice information:** your practice information sheet, schedule of fees and other policies and seasonal activities, such as 'flu vaccine clinics. This may also include access to translating and interpreting services.

## Children's play area

Children attending your practice may be visiting with ill siblings or a parent, or may be unwell themselves. Providing a space where children can play safely and quietly without disturbing others will create a more harmonious environment. A safe children's area will consist of:

- A non-slip floor.
- Easily cleaned floors, walls and other surfaces for infection control.
- No sharp edges.
- A soft closing gate, if enclosing the area.

Toys and games that are:

- Age appropriate and safe.
- Made of non-porous material, such as plastic or intact lacquered wood and easily disassembled for cleaning; or
- Disposable, such as colouring-in paper and crayons.

## Consulting Rooms

A list of equipment for comprehensive patient care can be found in the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Standards for general practices: 4th edition (Criterion 5.2.1). The ideal physical layout of a safe, comfortable and efficient consulting room will:

- Be maintained at a comfortable ambient temperature.
- Have an inviting atmosphere.
- Be free from excessive noise and have adequate lighting.
- Have an examination couch (at least one height adjustable bed in the practice for patients with low mobility). Include a flexible wall mounted examination light.
- Ensure patient privacy when the patient needs to undress for a clinical examination (eg, by the use of curtains, screens, gowns or sheets).
- Have two exits.
- Be easily cleaned for routine and scheduled environmental cleaning to reduce risk of infection transmission.
- Be uncluttered and hazard free. Consider computer cabling, toys on the floor, trip hazards.
- Comfortably seat a patient, friends, family members or carers as required. Consider disabled access including wheelchair width doorways.
- Include the safe and compliant storage of uncontrolled drugs (if any). Schedule 4 and 8 drugs will be stored in accordance with state regulations.
- Include suitable waste disposal units or bins, including a sharps container and disposal for the three waste streams (general, clinical and related waste).
- Have hand washing facilities including 'hands free' taps, sink, soap dispenser and paper towels.

Ensure medical consumables are stored out of the reach of children and preferably in the same configuration in each room. Consider wall mounting colour coded storage containers for:

- Dressings.
- Specimen jars.
- Single use equipment (auroscope tips, etc).
- Disposable gloves.
- Tongue depressors.
- Swabs.

## Procedural rooms

Patients undergoing minor procedures, immunisations or more detailed physical examinations such as an ECG or spirometry may be moved to a treatment or procedure room.

These rooms should be equipped to meet the clinical needs and potential emergencies of the medical practitioners and their patients. A safe and functional procedure or treatment room will include:

- Easy to reach emergency equipment. Consider the inclusion of an automated external defibrillator.
- A non-slip and easily cleaned floor.
- Emergency access by an ambulance and stretcher.
- Sufficient bench space to prepare for procedures.
- A height adjustable bed with sufficient space to move around the bed.
- Adequate storage space for materials and equipment. Labelled storage drawers, cupboards and containers.
- A procedure chair, cleanable, and durable with wide arm rests (for drawing blood, providing immunisations).
- Waste disposal units or bins, including a wall mounted sharps container, and disposal for the three waste streams.
- Separate hand washing facilities including 'hands free' taps, sink, soap dispenser and paper towels.
- Preferably one 'dirty' sink designated for washing; and
- One 'clean' sink for rinsing washed reusable medical devices.
- Good overhead lighting and an examination lamp.
- Access to a fully equipped spills and infection control kit.
- Centralised to all clinical staff.
- Access to electronic patient records.

- Equipment for maintaining an airway in both adults and children.
- Medical consumables that are stored out of the reach of children. Consider wall mounting colour coded storage containers for:
  - Dressings.
  - Specimen jars.
  - Single use equipment (auroscope tips, etc).
  - Disposable gloves.
  - Tongue depressors.
  - Swabs.

## Equipment processing area

The equipment processing area is used for the washing, sterilisation and storage of medical materials and equipment. Work surfaces must be made of a smooth, non-porous material without cracks or crevices to allow for efficient cleaning.

The area must include:

- A workflow pattern of systematically moving items from dirty to clean. This enables items to progress from the cleaning area to sterile storage area without re-contamination.
- Hand washing facilities (separate from equipment decontamination sink).
- Adequate bench space for drying, packaging, cooling and processing medical equipment.
- Good lighting.
- Waste disposal units or bins, including a wall mounted sharps container, and disposal for the three waste streams.
- Adequate storage space for materials and equipment. Labelled storage drawers, cupboards and containers.
- This area may also include secure storage cupboards for Schedule 4 and 8 drugs.

## Additional areas of consideration

- A nurse station or private office for conducting chronic disease management plans, pre-employment medicals, health assessments and immunisations.
- Secure storage for medicines and consumables and a dedicated vaccine fridge.
- Disabled access (lifts, ramps, hand rails).
- Sufficient parking.
- Staff and patient (separate) bathrooms.
- A secure filing area/room.
- Staff kitchen/break and meeting room. This room should include food preparation equipment, food storage, telephone access and be large enough to accommodate a number of people.

- Dedicated safe storage of the practice server. Include temperature control, good ventilation and fire suppression. Secure the room with an alarm and ensure the area is hazard (trip) free.
- Consideration for cultural needs of the community, for example, separate men's and women's entrances.
- A fully equipped private office for the practice manager.

## References and more information

### **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)**

Infection prevention and control standards: 5th edition

<http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/infectioncontrol/>

### **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)**

Standards for general practices: 4th edition

<http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/standards4thedition/>

### **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)**

Rebirth of a clinic

<http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/business/design/>

### **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)**

General practice – A safe place: A guide for the prevention and management of patient-initiated violence.

<http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/business/tools/safetyprivacy/gpsafeplace/>