



Renovating Nursing Homes and Senior Living for Greater Profitability

In the world of senior care and health care, change is the only constant. The for-profit and religious non-profits that own skilled nursing centers need to make improvements to their facilities to not only keep them marketable, but also maintain financial stability through higher occupancy.

Skilled nursing facilities have struggled with Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, and have reconfigured their buildings for short-term rehabilitation patients. Short-term rehab stays are typically covered by major insurance and represent a better revenue stream than government reimbursements that do not always cover the nursing home's costs.

Similarly, in assisted living or personal care homes, some communities with a light census have opted to convert standard private and semi-private rooms to dementia rooms within a secure memory care unit. This often provides a [senior living](#) community with an edge over competitors who do not have memory care units. Additionally, it helps a senior living facility retain residents who develop dementia and would seek care elsewhere. Additionally, memory care generates more revenue than standard assisted living.

Les McCoy, President of interior design firm DesignPoint offers insights to nursing homes and assisted living facilities seeking to convert or renovate areas for short-term rehab or secure dementia units. DesignPoint has consulted numerous clients through this process.

Converting Skilled Nursing Beds Into Short-Term Rehabilitation Beds

In Philadelphia, DesignPoint has been consulting with a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) over the last 15 years or more. At the community's skilled nursing center they wanted to convert a quarter of the rooms to short-term rehab. The management team recognized that short-term rehab patients were younger and more vibrant than the traditional long-term care patients. With this in mind, they looked to DesignPoint to maximize space utilization for staff workflow as well as patient comfort and appeal.

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DesignPoint changed the layout of the facility to separate short-term rehab from the long-term care. Each had a separate entrance. Short-term rehab was given a small lobby, a café area and a sitting area with a large flat screen television in its common space. The existing rooms and hallway were utilized but remodeled with new flooring, paint, furniture and fixtures. The environment was modern, trendy, and more inviting to boomers and younger seniors than the geriatric feel of the long-term unit. DesignPoint was able to retain the same number of rooms for short-term rehab as there had been for long-term care.

Converting Assisted Living Rooms to a Dementia Memory Care Unit

At the same CCRC high-rise campus, management turned DesignPoint's focus to creating the new memory care unit. The memory care community was to be developed out of a wing of a nursing floor. "From our experience, we know that in memory care units they are very concerned about lighting and receiving natural light. Light affects the way that residents act and feel; differentiating day and night," explains McCoy. "This was our first priority. We had to bring in as much natural light as possible. This was especially difficult in the common areas that lacked windows because the resident rooms were on the perimeter. In order to bring light into the common areas the only solution was to strategically remove a resident room or two for the benefit of improving the overall environment. It's much easier in new builds where natural light can be planned for all areas in the initial design stage."

For the memory care unit new windows were added, window treatments were changed, and a resident room was used to open up and bring light into the common area. Similarly, access was created to a new, fenced in, and locked patio area.

New materials were installed for flooring and furnishings. Floor covering included wood-look vinyl and a limited use of carpeting to help separate spaces that replicate the feeling of a home. DesignPoint also recommended new styles of comfortable vinyl furniture. In memory care it is imperative to keep the environment clean, much like a hospital. Much of the furniture and décor is chosen for the ease of cleaning. The trick is not to make it look like a hospital or institutional facility.

The expanded common areas also allowed the dementia unit to create spaces where caregivers could be out and engage residents. Activity stations were identified and built that encouraged residents to walk

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around. This replicates their lifestyles from the past where residents could move from a beverage station to the music room to the games and activities area. A quiet room was also established with soothing tones where agitated residents could relax and find comfort. In these rooms the dementia caregivers could also use their books and technology designed for each resident's life history. A multipurpose area was also created where residents could do familiar hands-on activities, like folding laundry, that brought them comfort.

In the patient rooms modifications were made for safety as well as shelving to store memory boxes. The memory boxes with personal effects and familiar decorations communicated to residents that they were in their room in case they became confused.

“With all senior care communities whether skilled nursing or assisted living, there are many things that can be done to convert and improve the facilities, but there is not any one solution. Each building and campus varies so much that one solution for a facility probably will not work for another,” says McCoy.

For this reason, interior designers like the team at DesignPoint, understand the unique challenges of each community and can quickly identify tailored solutions to fit management's budget.

[DesignPoint](#) is located in the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and works extensively on both a regional and national level. DesignPoint, Inc. is a full service Interior Design & Purchasing Firm with a focus on corporate, hospitality, senior living, medical offices and high-end residential interiors. When considering new interior construction or renovations, DesignPoint will provide complete interior architectural space planning, construction documents, and furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) procurement services to make it a successful project. DesignPoint is located in Bethlehem, PA and can be reached at 610-807-9670 or online at info@designpoint-interiors.com.

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