

Why hospital architects need to talk to nurses

August 9 2018, by Jens Roehrich



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many of us pay close attention to how our taxes are spent, and how well governments invest in infrastructure projects such as roads, schools and hospitals. Value for money is key. Yet horror stories of waste, lateness and poor quality are common.

To develop and finance public services and infrastructure, governments around the world (but especially in Europe) have become increasingly

keen on private sector involvement. These cross-sector collaborations can help provide value for money for taxpayers – but they are also at risk of wasting it.

In health care, collaborations between public and private partners have a direct impact on society. This is why it is important for health care professionals like doctors and nurses to talk directly to the designers and builders of a new hospital. It ensures that these projects not only deliver economic value for the [private companies](#) building the hospital – but also social value for the doctors, nurses and patients who will use the hospital for decades to come.

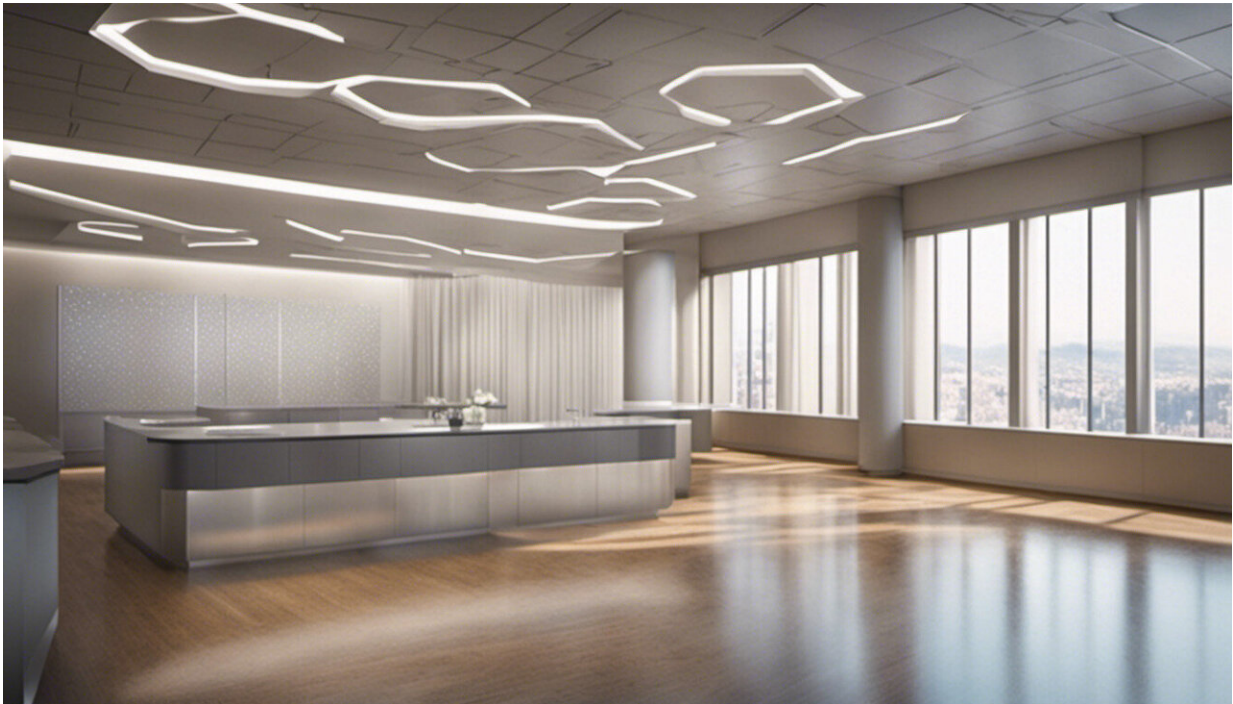
For instance, in one recently built British hospital, medical staff were able to bring valuable insight to the design process. A visit by some of the hospital's senior nurses to a children's hospital in the US led to the replication of a lighting design on the ceiling of a children's ward so that it mimicked a starry night sky. As one of the nurses explained to me afterwards: "It might sound like a small change, but it provides a much more homely surrounding than the normal NHS lighting. This is important for our young patients [providing a] less scary, hospital experience which positively impacts on the healing process. [...] It creates a much nicer environment in which our little patients can recover."

In another hospital, input from senior nurses helped to establish a ward design that most suited their professional needs – right down to the placement of plumbing. This saved large amounts of money that might have been spent on undoing unnecessary building work had the nurses not been consulted.

As one project manager of the construction company told me: "Thanks to [the senior nurses'] input and telling us how they intend to use wards, we changed the ward layout, such as the position of sinks. This may

seem to be a minor issue, but may have a huge impact when caring for a patient."

To see how social value can be best achieved through cross-sector collaborations we [looked into](#) the key building blocks that go beyond a mere focus on contracts.



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An organisations' prior experience of cross sector collaboration and a supportive climate is vital in creating social value. It also helps to have had some exposure to previous projects (good and bad). But a major ingredient is the individual employees in both public and private sector organisations.

Building mutual knowledge and aligning goals between doctors, nurses and design and construction professionals is key, as public and private sector employees often have different objectives for projects (making a profit vs healing patients). A shared understanding can come through listening to and appreciating the other parties' professional language and the expertise that language expresses.

Joint expertise

Beyond an understanding of the other parties' expertise, practical matters of shared goals and jointly developed timelines are necessary. Coordinating efforts between the two sectors needs to take priority at the outset – rather than emphasising project speed and completion.

To encourage these positive outcomes, the key people need to meet frequently to exchange information, address problems and discuss plans. Without this kind of coordination and collaboration, it will be impossible to make the most of both sides' specialist knowledge.

So when it comes to hospitals and clinics, the private company needs to actively seek the involvement of doctors and nurses in the design and construction phases. Similarly, doctors and nurses should not be threatened by private companies, but instead seek to become actively engaged. This will help drive creative design innovations such as the "[night sky](#)" ceiling in the children's ward.

It takes time and resources, but this kind of collaboration and coordination between public and private sectors provides an opportunity to increase value – both economic and social. And that's something that not only benefits construction companies and [health care professionals](#) – but patients and taxpayers, too.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Why hospital architects need to talk to nurses (2018, August 9) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-08-hospital-architects-nurses.html>

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