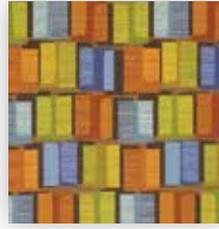


Momentum Textiles' Carouse line offers attractive vinyl upholstery options.



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— Kim Colby, supply chain director at Centerpoint Medical Center



The Nurture Empath recliner features pass-through design and urethane arm caps for easier cleaning.

Rest Easy

Lowering infection potential with smart choices on facility furniture

While healthcare facilities are working to maximize reimbursements by minimizing hospital-acquired infections, many infection control officers overlook furniture as an area to focus their attention. In the past, furniture providers and hospital buyers often chose products because they were inexpensive or attractive without considering whether they did a good job at infection control. With advances in technology and production, supply chain managers can choose attractive products that are not only well built and reasonably priced, but also minimize the potential for infection.

Daryl Dunn, vice president of healthcare at Interior Design Services, Inc., offers several suggestions for thinking through furniture choices with infection reduction in mind:

Find the right upholstery. Seating upholstery is an obvious place for harboring bacteria. When seats are covered

in standard fabrics, bodily fluids or spills can seep right into the foam, becoming a breeding ground for germs. Covering your furniture with appropriate upholstery is the best way to prevent these scenarios. Years ago, vinyl upholstery came in limited colors and textures and much of it was unattractive. Today, there are thousands of vinyl options, including scores of colors, patterns and textures.

“We really like the choice of vinyl coverings for our facility because we can use the same bleach surface wipes to clean them that we use to clean other hard surfaces,” says **Kim Colby**, supply chain director at Centerpoint Medical Center in

Independence, Mo. “Having cleanable surfaces is so very important, and the easier, the better.”

Even better than vinyls, though, are newer PVC-free polyurethane upholsteries, which are friendlier to the environment. Both vinyls and polyurethanes are impervious to liquids. They still need to be regularly cleaned by the housekeeping staff, but they do prevent moisture from reaching the seat foam.

Cover your upholstery with resistant solutions. Another option for protecting your seating is to use a treated solution on upholstery. Options include blended upholstery that is water-resistant (such as Crypton), upholstery treatments that provide a spill- and stain-resistant finish (such as Nano-Tex), moisture barriers (such as DuraBlock) and a simple moisture barrier beneath regular upholstery to prevent moisture from reaching the foam. A newer manufacturer, HealthCentric, provides a coated vinyl seating product that has moisture, bedbug and infection barriers.

Consider antibacterial treatments. New technologies allow both metal and wood surfaces to be treated with silver ions, which inhibit bacteria growth, or other antimicrobial treatments. Furniture provider Carolina, for example, infuses silver ion particles into all exposed woods in its products.

Look carefully at design. Another area to consider is the design and construction of the furniture itself. Seating should always have an open wipe-out area between the seat and the back so that trash, crumbs, debris and fluids can be wiped to the floor and more easily cleaned. Seating without an open wipe-out means that dirt and germs accumulate in the crevice at the back of the chair. Furniture also should have enough room to allow the housekeeping staff to clean underneath the item.

Minimize seams. Consider furniture items with seamless surfaces. A thermoformed laminate surface eliminates seams, as do solid-surface options such as Corian.

Don't forget about arm caps. Chair arms are another high-contact area. Typical options for covering them are upholstered, wood and urethane arm caps. For infection control purposes, nonporous urethane arm caps are by far the best because they can be easily cleaned. Upholstered arm caps are not recommended.

If a facility considers the factors outlined above when choosing furniture it will have taken great strides in reducing the chance of infection transmission. It's also vital for the clinical and supply chain teams to work together to make these important decisions.

"The whole process for choosing hospital furniture should begin with open communication between the infection prevention, environmental services and supply chain teams," says **Angie Finch**, R.N., infection prevention manager for Parkridge Medical Center in Chattanooga, Tenn. "It's important for the infection prevention team to be involved because of the potential risk for transmission of multidrug-resistant organisms." She and **Scott Sebring**, Parkridge's materials management director, discuss products before they're brought into the facility to ensure that there are no potential transmission risks for patients or visitors.

"Resistant organisms today can live for months on inanimate surfaces if not cleaned appropriately, and a bleach-based disinfectant is the only effective product to treat some of these organisms," Finch

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— Angie Finch, R.N., infection prevention manager at Parkridge Medical Center

explains. "Choosing furniture that is infection-resistant and/or a vinyl that can withstand bleach-based disinfectants is the only smart choice for hospitals." ●

Learn more about IDS solutions (HealthTrust contract #500171) at www.ids-tn.com or by contacting Daryl Dunn at 615.405.0828; ddunn@ids-tn.com. For information on the various materials used in covering IDS furniture, visit www.themomgroup.com, www.cryptonfabric.com, www.healthdesign.org, www.carolinabusinessfurniture.com/tools/silverban, www.healthcentric.com or www.nanotex.com.

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