




Hospitals will follow in the footsteps of retail and hospitality shifting to experience economy while delivering safer environments for their patients

PRIORITIZING PRIMARY CARE PATIENT EXPERIENCE IN A POST-COVID-19 ERA

By Henry Chao, AE7



Some of the worst national public health crises in history have taken place in the last two decades. With epidemics like SARS, H1N1, Ebola, and the ZIKA virus, a 30-40% increase in obesity, and the devastating resurgence of the opioid epidemic, it is safe to say that health has emerged as the most pressing issue of the 21st century.

And yet, it took the COVID-19 pandemic to truly illuminate the struggles of America's flawed healthcare system. While every public health crisis strains the industry to a degree, the speed and fatality of COVID-19 arguably devastated it. On top of depleting resources and exhausting and endangering the lives of healthcare workers, this crisis has exposed the industry's ongoing major issues, like skyrocketing out-of-pocket costs, uneven distribution of care, a broken insurance system, outdated technology, and lack of universal accessibility.

Rebuilding consumer trust will require the healthcare industry to follow in the footsteps of retail, transportation, and hospitality, and embrace the experience economy—a shift that already began to take place in recent years. "Consumers are looking for highly personalized, simple and connected experiences that place them squarely in charge and make them feel empowered," industry leader Geeta Wilson told Forbes in July 2019. "They want to be heard, understood and accompanied by friends, family and healthcare experts as they traverse their health journey – all while receiving the highest levels of quality care."

For the foreseeable future, positive healthcare experiences will be measured by the industry's ability to project the actual and perceived experience of safety. How can healthcare environments be adapted to truly prioritize patient and staff welfare? How can healthcare professionals adjust their day-to-day practice to communicate a greater sense of patient wellbeing? Making visible changes to promote safer environments will begin to rebuild consumer trust in a post-COVID-19 landscape.



Providing telemedicine services in a professional setting with adequate lighting and privacy while engaging the patient through visuals and technology.

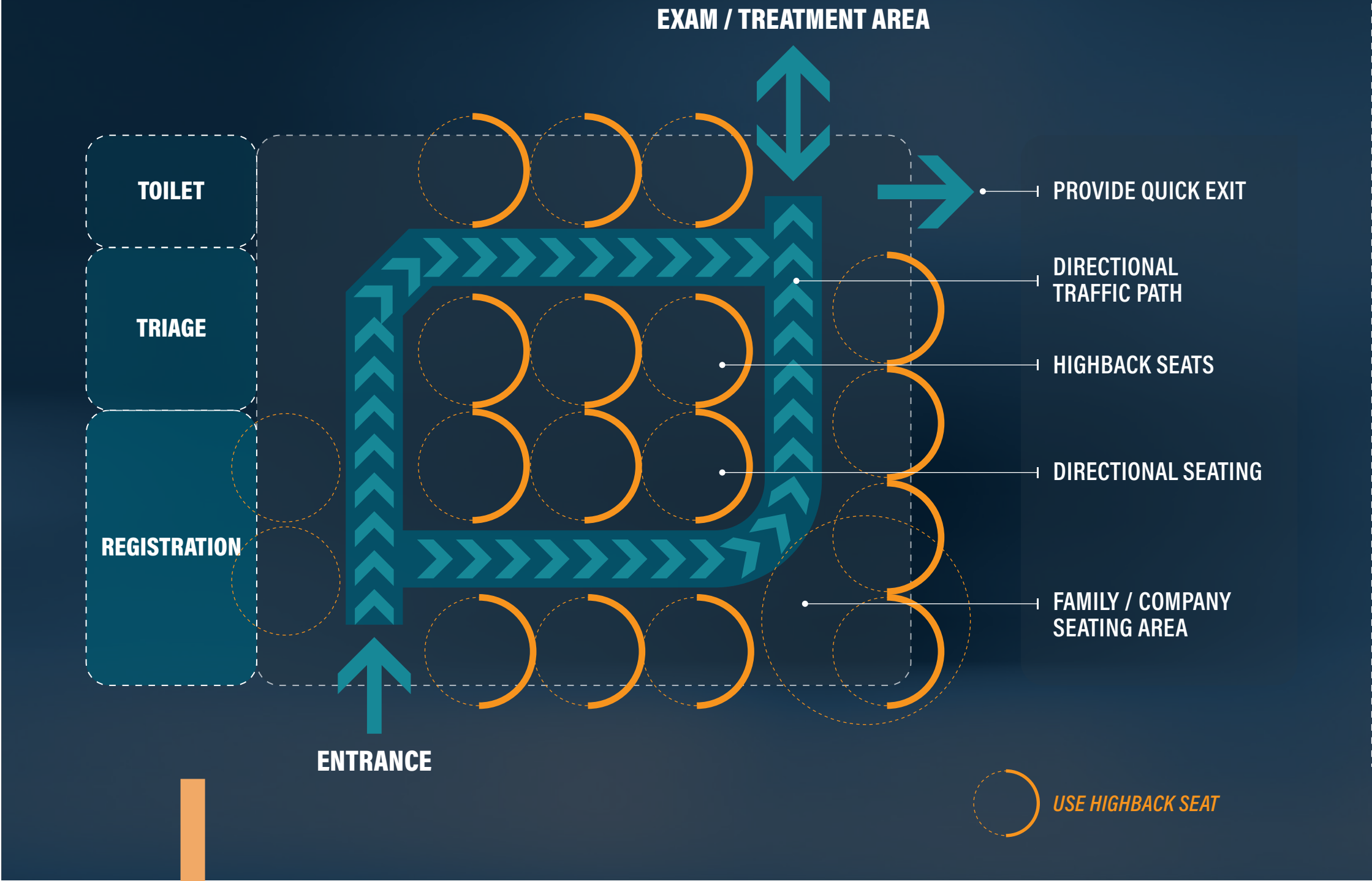
1. THE TELEHEALTH RENAISSANCE

The advancement of telehealth technology has provided healthcare workers with a necessary alternate channel of communication, connection, and care during the COVID-19 crisis. Given that virtual health offers a safe and accessible way to obtain care and knowledge for both patients and caregivers, the capacity, quality, and comprehensiveness of telehealth will likely grow, even after stay-at-home restrictions are lifted.

A more regular use of telemedicine will require that virtual care spaces meet the same quality standards of physical care spaces. This could include camera-ready rooms with adequate lighting and acoustic privacy for multiple simultaneous care sessions, as well as developing standards for how providers virtually engage with consumers.

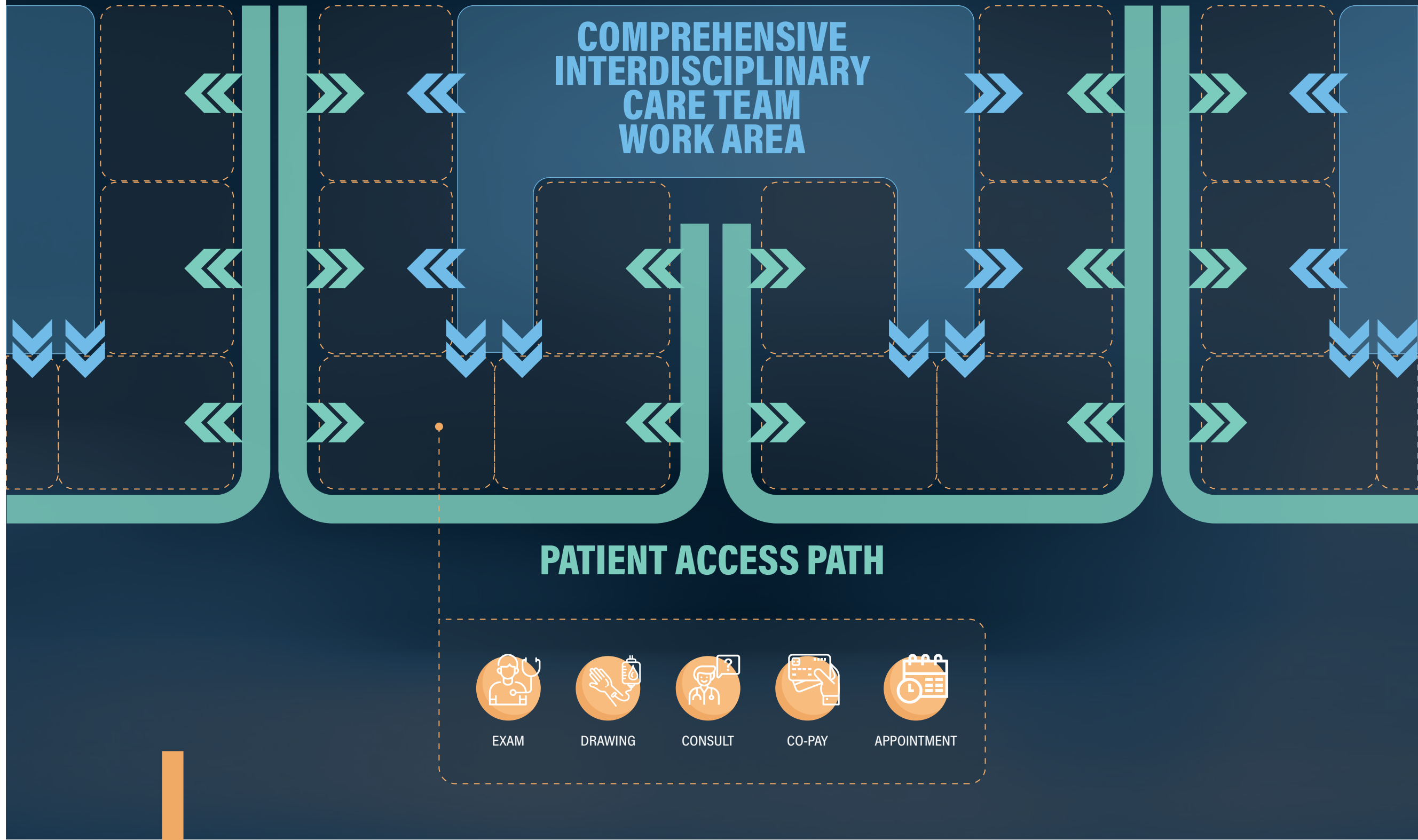
Allegheny Health Network, one of Pittsburgh's largest healthcare providers, announces that their telehealth program has grown from less than 50 patient appointments per day prior to the pandemic to 4,000 per day now (June 2020).

WAITING ROOM



2. THE NEW WAITING ROOM

Though the waiting room has arguably never been a favorable space, Covid-19 has rendered it potentially dangerous. In lieu of patients visiting a central registration counter and sharing space in a cramped waiting area, visitors could check-in virtually via personal devices, which would enable them to wait outside the office or in their vehicles until an exam room was ready. This could result in a dramatic capacity reduction, which would allow facilities to reduce waiting room seating, helping to accommodate social distancing guidelines for those with accessibility issues.



3. A TRULY PATIENT-CENTRIC CARE EXPERIENCE

Patients typically visit numerous stations and rooms during a single visit: reception, waiting area, consult room, exam room, payment and scheduling desk. Rather than having every patient travel from one space to another, consider keeping all patient care activities in a single room to avoid potential risk of disease spreading. Can vitals be taken from a mobile technological device? Can the patient pay via a portable tablet? Having healthcare workers travel and patients stay put will help to eliminate contamination.



AN UPDATED CLINIC LAYOUT

Exam rooms will need to be thoroughly cleaned after the exam and before the next patient, which will in turn slow down the turnover rate. The typical 2-3 exam rooms per caregiver might need to increase to avoid downtime, which could also mean longer wait times for patients. One solution will be integrating regularly-placed cleaning equipment alcoves among the exam rooms to expedite the disinfection process.



GLOVES



MASKS

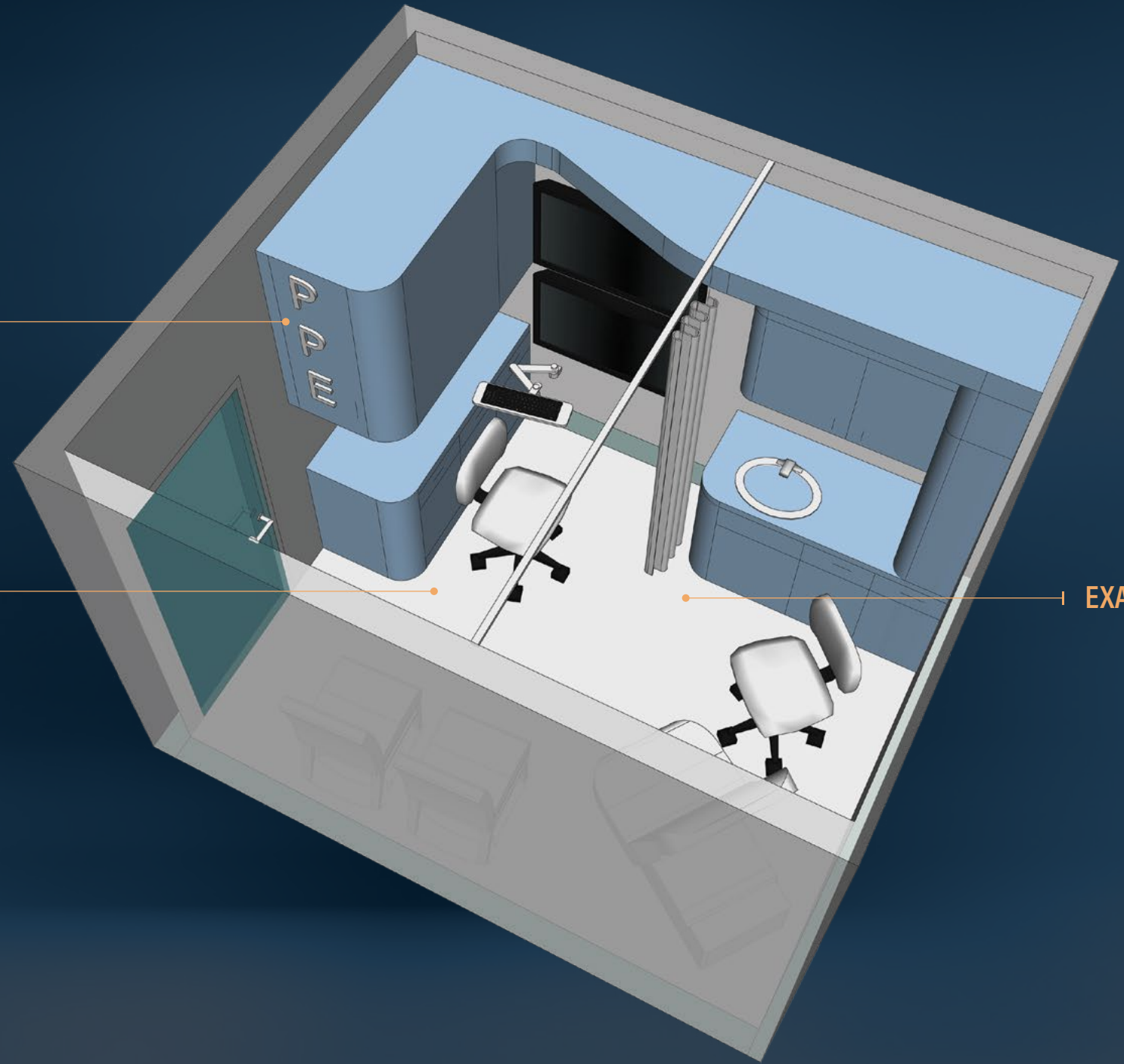


GOWNS

IN-ROOM
DONNING
& DOFFING

CONSULTATION
ZONE

EXAMINATION ZONE



4. IN-ROOM PPE STORAGE

Patients have grown accustomed to seeing their providers wash and or sanitize their hands upon entering the exam room, but the recent emphasis on PPE will require providers to up their game. Seeing care providers gowning-up or putting on fresh face masks and gloves prior to an exam will help to elevate a patient's sense of trust and comfort, especially after numerous news of orders from institutions to their staff to re-use PPE during the Covid-19 crisis.



5.

THERMAL BODY-TEMPERATURE-SCANNING

Thermal scanning technology allows for the medical team to take patients' temperatures without having to come into close contact. Installing a thermal body temperature scanner at a facility entrance will help to keep employees and patients safe, and also allow for more people to get their temperatures taken with less staff time. This way, staff can deal safely and appropriately with potentially infected patients.



6.

ELEVATE STAFF EXPERIENCE

The positive healthcare experience must also extend to the industry's most valuable—and vulnerable—resource: its workers. The most heroic stories to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis come from the care staff and first line responders. Offering dedicated staff spaces that provide a moment of respite will go a long way in recruiting and retaining staff and, by extension, improving the patient experience.

It might seem unthinkable to consider facility adjustment at a moment when the COVID-19 crisis is still ongoing, and many parts of this country have not yet hit the peak. But as Dwight D. Eisenhower so memorably put it: “In preparing for battle I have always found plans useless but planning indispensable.” The lessons learned from battling this crisis will greatly illuminate the steps we need to take to better protect patients, staff, and healthcare businesses after the crisis is over.