

The Importance of Clinic Interiors

Miss Sherina Balaratnam explains how the interior design of your clinic can have an impact on patient satisfaction

Introduction

Having recently refurbished and launched my new clinic this year, I have enjoyed the experience and opportunity of creating a personalised and unique environment for patients seeking medical aesthetic treatments.

The interior and décor of an aesthetic clinic is integral to the overall patient experience. From the lighting and colour scheme, to the layout of furniture and display materials, it is essential to create a welcoming environment for patients to feel instantly at ease and reassured by the calibre of their surroundings.

The creation of functional, aesthetically-pleasing spaces, will in turn improve the patient experience, comfort and overall satisfaction, and may even increase employee productivity. In this article, I shall be detailing how to create the ideal environment for patients and outlining points to consider when choosing interiors for an aesthetic clinic.

Where to start?

The process begins well before choosing furniture and equipment. First, it is crucial to research and consider how the clinic space will function:

- **Look for inspiration:** Many clinics showcase themselves visually via their website and social media. Take a look at a few different sites and consider what aspects of design you like, what works well and what could translate into your own clinic environment.
- **Evaluate:** Look at the layout and floor space of your clinic and consider how the space should function. How can the layout operate at maximum efficiency to allow patients and staff to interact as seamlessly as possible?
- **Put pen to paper:** Create mood boards and scrapbooks of images, colours and textures. These will help you capture the aesthetic you are aiming for and also communicate to third party trades and others what you envisage it to look like.

In addition to the treatment and consultation rooms, a whole host of other areas and aspects of your clinic will require consideration. Some of those are:

- **Payment processing**
Ideally transactions are made with as much discretion as possible.
- **Secure storage of products**
Important not only from a security perspective, but also considering botulinum toxin is a prescription medication that needs to be securely stored.
- **Waiting room**
How many patients can wait at any time? Consider that some patients may bring a friend or family member.

- **Before and after photography**

Designate an area with good lighting, not too much shadow and a black, non-reflective background that won't bounce flash photography.

- **Office(s)**

Lockable storage of all clinical records, storage of marketing materials and associated materials for the day-to-day clinic operations.

- **Marketing materials**

What type of display(s) will be implemented? How will literature be displayed so it is visible and readily accessible?

- **Laundry**

How will dirty towels and associated items be washed, dried and stored?

- **Staff areas**

Where can your staff go during break times?

- **Privacy**

If a patient has to apply numbing cream, is there somewhere they can sit in private during this phase of a treatment?

After following the above method, I created a two-dimensional floor plan to provide an aerial view. I would advise that this is a valuable method to adopt as it enabled every single item of furniture to be planned in, and associated elements such as door clearance, walkway space and the location of product displays to be accurately captured in advance of ordering furniture.

It is important to also consider how flexible these spaces can be. For example, if your clinic will be hosting talks or training sessions, can the space be reconfigured and is the furniture moveable to enable different activities to take place in a particular room? First impressions begin with the clinic exterior. In my personal experience, patients undergoing medical aesthetic treatments typically seek and expect a certain level of discretion. As such, I opted for frosted glass on the exterior of the building to showcase both the clinic branding and website, whilst also protecting patient's privacy and having a more functional purpose by directing patients to the discreet side entrance.

The waiting room

Televisions in reception areas can be a divisive topic. A constantly repeating, short loop is more likely to create irritation amongst customers and staff than encourage sales. Smart TVs, however, can easily stream content from a variety of sources and ensure a diverse, regularly changing,

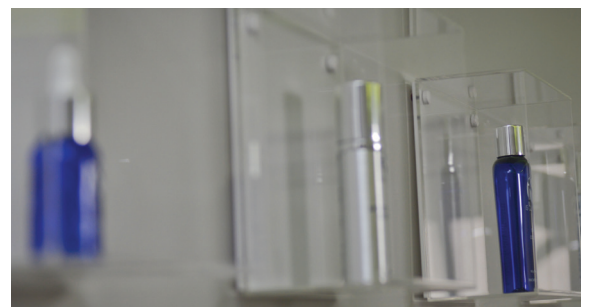


Figure 1: S-THETICS 'floating acrylic boxes' for easy accessibility for patients

yet targeted range of content reflecting a clinic's treatment and product portfolio. If waiting rooms are separate to a clinic reception, for security, stock may need to be secured in lockable units, with testers being part of the consultation and treatment process. Space constraints can mean the typical large, floor-standing display units are not practical. Instead, I opted for a streamlined look of wall-mounted 'floating acrylic boxes', all open-fronted to help with accessibility (**Figure 1**) These were strategically positioned within arms reach and eye-height. This has encouraged patients to interact with and try products, and has in turn helped drive both product awareness and retail sales.



Figure 2: S-THETICS treatment room designed with stronger lighting for patients to feel comfortable during treatment

Lighting and ambience

Given the importance of the clinic 'atmosphere', having the right lighting in place can greatly enhance the appearance and feel of a clinic and also shape first impressions. A room with limited light would likely appear claustrophobic and unwelcoming to patients. Before creating a detailed lighting plan, sources of

natural light should be identified and their impact on each room mapped out. Wherever possible, available natural light should be maximised. As well as for patients, it is more beneficial for clinic staff to not spend their entire working day under artificial light. A study by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne found that people who spend more time in natural lighting compared to those in artificial lighting have increased productivity and alertness.¹ Consider if there are particular features such as furniture or product displays you wish to highlight. For example, ceiling spotlights would not be suited to treatment rooms where body treatments are undertaken, where a patient may spend the majority of time lying flat and looking up. A room that is designed for injectable treatments, however, requires stronger lighting, so ceiling spotlights would work well in this environment. For instance, injectable procedures require precise technique and identification of facial anatomy such as visible veins, hence they require strong lighting (**Figure 2**). I added an LED shadow gap light to my main reception, as a cool white or multi-coloured LED lighting enables the creation of either a more clinical environment or a very different ambience for events and presentations.

Who are your target patients?

Throughout the process, the needs and expectations of future patients should always be kept in mind. Designing your clinic links closely to your marketing plan; you will have already identified your target customers, so you should take into account the most suitable environment for these patients. An example of this could be a city centre clinic that is used for busy city workers visiting in their lunch hour or pre and post-office hours. The focus will be on efficient and rapid patient processing, as many patients will have limited time for treatments. For instance, multiple payment terminals could be a solution to effectively process transactions during busy periods of the day. With men now accounting for nearly 14% of all cosmetic procedures and with that trend predicted to steadily increase,² the clinic interior and decoration should have a unisex appeal to accommodate this ever-increasing statistic. Broadly, patients could be classified into two distinct categories:

1. Those who have been having medical aesthetic treatments on multiple occasions and, therefore, are likely to be more at ease with the clinic environment.
2. Those who may not have set foot in such a clinic previously and, consequently, could be more apprehensive.

For those who fit into the second category, a number of steps can be put in place to ease their potential anxieties:

- Provide easy access to relevant treatment and product literature, such as brochures and leaflets on treatment options.
- Face the treatment room couch away from the door, so as to not immediately appear potentially intimidating.
- Position the practitioner's desk so as not to create a barrier.
- Ensure seating is arranged to encourage positive communication – the patient could be seated at the end of a desk to help this process.

Each patient that comes through the door is different, with varied personalities, concerns and needs. The in-house marketing must therefore contain the right information to address these variations. For instance, a potential acne patient may actually be the child of the patient sat in your waiting room, so having the right practical information for your patients on display could encourage patient retention or referral.

Conclusion

In 1973, Professor Philip Kotler identified that there was a link between a physical environment and product-purchasing decisions in his study of atmospherics. He said, "In some cases, the place, more specifically the *atmosphere* of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision. In some cases the atmosphere is the primary product."³ The clinic interior is imperative for the success of any medical aesthetic clinic business. It sets the tone for patient expectations as to how they will be treated and cared for, the calibre of the team, the treatment portfolio and technology, as well as the aftercare services. In a market driven by a high degree of discretionary spend, a careful balance has to be struck between the desire to showcase products and literature to patients, and the importance of ensuring the clinic is not too much like a retail environment, overloaded with marketing material. The design process is about enhancing the patient journey and ensuring their whole experience is as comfortable, efficient and positive as possible. The aim should be to create an environment with a strong aesthetic identity, the flexibility to configure spaces and a consideration of how the clinic may evolve in the future. The correct synergy of aesthetics and functionality will provide a positive experience for both patients and clinic staff.



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