

## Editorial

### The Role of the Built Environment in our Healthy Academic Communities



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This issue may surprise some readers as it has a special focus on architecture, design, and the “health care-built environment” and how they play pivotal roles in shaping the health and well-being of all communities. We are very excited about the inclusion of a new cadre of authors—those from fields with other connections to health and academia—welcoming architects, designers, urban planners, and others to our publication.

This issue draws attention to the impact that the physical layout and design of a space has on human behavior and interaction. This approach includes the concept of *salutogenesis*, a model for socio-environmental influences on health. Our contributors have highlighted well-being on many levels. Recognizing the value of *Blue Zones* or environmental locations that have a history of longevity, we explore examples of the concept.

Well-designed public spaces encourage social cohesion, fostering a sense of community and belonging among residents and users. Certainly, parks, plazas, and pedestrian-friendly streets not only promote physical activity but can facilitate social connections and reduce isolation, which are essential components of mental and emotional well-being. Moreover, thoughtful architectural design can mitigate environmental stressors such as noise pollution and overcrowding, promoting psychological resilience and overall health.

The physical layout and design of healthcare facilities can impact patient outcomes and experiences. Understanding the historical perspective of how one of the leading healthcare facilities, The Johns Hopkins Hospital, answered the need of the community and the nation demonstrates how architecture and healthcare professionals work together to improve the health of the community.



Thoughtful design considerations such as access to natural light, ergonomic furniture, and calming aesthetics can contribute to reducing patient stress and anxiety, promoting faster recovery time and improved overall satisfaction with care. The built environment also plays a crucial role in supporting the efficient access and delivery of healthcare services and medical education. Functional and intuitive layouts of medical facilities enhance workflow, minimize medical errors, and optimize communication among healthcare providers. Additionally, sustainability and forward-thinking 'green' resources and building codes have been applied to facility systems such as heating, cooling, and ventilation to create a whole-system approach to health of the building for all occupants.

This connection and interworking relationship among our design and healthcare professionals occupy the priorities of our academic colleagues from both research and teaching domains. Understanding the role of the healthy work environment for students who experience high levels of stress and risky behaviors creates a synergy to not only promote academic success, but a healthier lifestyle throughout an academic career.

Sustainable design practices, including energy-efficient buildings and green infrastructure, can mitigate the impact of climate change and contribute to improved air quality and reduced rates of respiratory illnesses. Architecture, design, and the built environment can create healthier living environments that promote both physical and environmental well-being. In academic settings, well-designed learning environments can enhance student engagement, concentration, and academic performance. Spaces that foster collaboration, innovation, and creativity promote knowledge acquisition and contribute to the mental and emotional well-being of students, staff, and faculty. By providing accessible and adaptable spaces, well-designed classrooms, laboratories, and research facilities with integrated technology, an environment conducive to learning and collaboration can be fostered. Recognizing academic faculty contributions, we further explore the value of how teaching students about the health of the planet promotes both individual and community well-being.

More broadly, access to quality housing and infrastructure is fundamental to public health. Adequate housing that meets safety standards and provides access to essential services such as clean water and sanitation is crucial for preventing infectious diseases and improving overall health outcomes.

Architecture, design, and the built environment can promote a culture of wellness and innovation. For example, by incorporating elements of biophilic design, such as indoor greenery and natural materials, healthcare facilities and academic institutions can create environments that promote healing, creativity, and well-being. By prioritizing sustainability and environmental stewardship, these settings can reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to the broader sustainable development goals of mitigating climate change and promoting ecological sustainability.

Disciplines such as urban planning, architecture, and landscape design also have the power to address systemic inequalities and promote health equity within communities. By designing inclusive and accessible spaces, planners, architects, and designers can ensure that all residents have equal opportunities to access healthcare, education, and recreational facilities. Revitalizing neglected neighborhoods through strategic urban design interventions can stimulate economic development, reduce crime rates, and improve overall quality of life.

Ultimately, investing in the architecture, design, and built environment of communities is not only a matter of aesthetics as it can have far-reaching implications for the well-being of individuals and society; it is a key component of building healthy academic communities. With this focus in mind, we present in this issue several articles that connect to this topic. We hope you enjoy this different lens for your thoughtful review and that it challenges you to think more broadly about factors impacting healthy communities.