Research Paper: Hospitality in Hospitals

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Preface - The Inspiration

I clearly remember the first time I associated hotels with hospitals; I was in the eleventh grade and I already knew that I wanted to study a topic related to hotels and tourism. A representative of Les Roches- Switzerland (one of the most renowned schools of hospitality in the world) came to my high school and told us that the people who graduated with hospitality majors could use their careers in a vast number of businesses and institutions; one of them was hospitals. After this experience, every time I went to a hospital or clinic to visit someone, I thought of the similarities between the former and hotels, and continuously considered how hospitals could improve their services by replicating some successful hotels’ standards and features.

In 2012 I applied for a government scholarship from my country in which my research proposal was focused on what hotel practices and standards could be replicable in hospitals in order to improve services in those institutions. Thankfully, I was accepted and won the scholarship.

During my studies for my master's degree, I have been able to study new trends in the hospitality industry and review some cases of successful hospitals in the United States. At the same time, I have had the opportunity to visit some renowned hospitals in Boston and witnessed how their front-of-the-house operations work.

In addition, during this period, I had the great opportunity to do some consulting for one of the main private hospitals in Ecuador, the Hospital Metropolitano de Quito. There, I was able not only to examine new ideas and hospitality trends within hospitals, but also to put in practice what I have learned about this topic.
All these circumstances were source of inspiration and contributed to this essay. This research is focused on luxury hotels’ front of the house services and practices that could be applied to hospitals in order to improve the patients and families’ satisfaction.

With this paper, I want to give back to my country a little of what it gave to me, which was the possibility to study for my master’s abroad. Although, I also expect this document to be a small contribution to all those hospitals which are constantly seeking service improvements. I further hope that this can also contribute to the enhancement of healthcare quality in Ecuador.
**Introduction**

Let’s imagine for a second a hospital without doctors and medical equipment; and what we have is a building that could easily be a hotel (Urquiza, 2005). Hospitals and hotels have similar spaces like rooms with beds, lobbies, dining facilities, reception, laundry and social areas; at the same time they offer similar services which include night accommodations, room service and dining options. Keeping in mind the important differences between a hospital and a hotel, especially the reasons why customers are there, at hand there are several characteristics which both institutions share.

Nevertheless, our starting point is people, which is or should be the main priority for both industries. Hospitals and hotels live and operate by and for the people, mainly because they are service providers. Therefore, in these institutions there is an intrinsic intangible component in delivering the service which is what the employees provide to the customers. In the case of hospitals the entire operation works or should work for the main objective to recover and heal patients, while in hotels the main outcome is directed to satisfy or even exceed the guest’s expectations. After all, both industries share the common goal of achieving high customer satisfaction.

Some hospitals around the world had already incorporated hotel features and practices to their operations and they are now treating patients also like guests; in fact some of them like five-star hotel guests. Why not? Ultimately, patients need not only the same but even more attention than any other hotel guest that travels for business or luxury. Nowadays, many of these hospitals have included its own hospitality department or division focused on the service and comfort of patients and their families.
This doesn’t mean that hospitals should lose their main focus which is to treat and cure patients, but they should not forget that patients are human beings who have other needs to be attended, understanding that the small details can make a big difference on their comfort and even recovery.

One approach that explains very well the healthcare services is the one presented by Dingemans (2012). He mentioned that there are three layers in health care service: the first one is the core service, which is basically to treat and cure patients. The second one is the actual service, being the performance of medical services, such as clinical results or the quality of care given by the staff. The third layer is the non-medical care or what he called the augmented service that is what enhances the patient experience.

This research is about that augmented service: “this is where there is space for value innovation and differentiation” (Dingemans, 2012).

So what are those small details that create the augmented service? What hotel standards can be applied to hospitals? Can all hospitals adapt certain hotel characteristics?

All these questions are narrow down to one big question, which would be the purpose of this research:

**Research Question**

*What key elements of luxury hotels can be applied to hospitals, in order to improve the comfort and satisfaction of patients and their families?*
Methodology

The purpose of the research is to explore previous literature, such as interviews, studies, anecdotes, and articles, in combination with the author’s observations and experience in the field.
Hospitals Uniqueness and VOC Importance

The purpose of this paper is to find out some features and services of hotels that might be applicable in hospitals. However, it is important to point out that not all those services and features might be applicable to all hospitals. Every establishment is unique and based on their singularity they may apply or not certain hotel characteristics. According to a variety of factors, including its own environment (external and internal), strategies, philosophy and ultimate goals, management should define the scope of what hospitality services are transferable to the hospital.

Since each hospital is unique, hearing the needs and requests of their own customers and employees, as well as what is going around its own environment is fundamental in order to know what has to be implemented. Receiving feedback and suggestions from internal and external customers is what we call Voice of the Customer (VOC). At this point, is important to mention that the external customers in a hospital are not only the patients but also their families, friends and any type of companion.

Hospitals that have innovated have been usually guided by open minded leaders who have used and applied correctly the VOC. Such is the case of Patrick Charmel, CEO of Griffin Hospital in Connecticut. Mr. Charmel understood that hearing and responding to his patients and employees recommendations was the clue to survive against larger and aggressive competitors. Some of the changes he implemented by hearing the customers’ requests were for example, adding cozy home-style kitchens with easy access to patient rooms or installing wooden handrails in hallways, rather than steel made (Daft, 2008).
Each hospital is singular and has its own needs depending on culture, location, goals and endless other factors. Therefore, to start a change, one of the main clues for hospital leaders is to put in practice an efficient VOC process to listen what their own employees and customers have to say. Based on the hospital particular requests and needs, managers can start adapting hotel features according to their own convenience. In addition, hospital managers should always consider both, the internal and external environment of the company, its values and strategic vision, in order to make improvements aligned to their unique situation.
Findings and Discussion

After taking into account the singularity of each hospital institution, now is time to review some services and practices of luxury hotels that can or have already been included in certain hospitals around the world. Based on previous literature and for a better comprehension for the reader, the hospitality elements have been divided into three main areas:

(1) Features

(2) Design, and

(3) Customer Service

In a hospital, these three areas should be aligned between each other based on a common and efficient service strategy established by management, and always considering the healthcare context in which the service is offered.

In the following sections we would review more in detail each of these areas:

Hospitality Features (Services)

For the purpose of this research we categorized hospitality features as those non-medical services provided by the hospital in favor of patients and their families. The feature is the name of the service itself. Examples of hospitality features and services are room-service meals, concierge service, massage therapies or simply the wi-fi access in the guest room.

According to Coldman and Romley (2008) patients value hotel-like features twice as much as they value clinical reputation when making hospital choices (as cited in Ziqi et
Moreover, “surveys such as those conducted by Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) have shown that hospitals that incorporate extra features and amenities score higher on satisfaction surveys” (Kraus and Jensen, 2010). Therefore, healthcare institutions offering additional services and amenities can improve customer’s satisfaction, which could contribute not only to get a better environment but to improve the bottom line by making more money.

Based on previous literature and on personal observations, here are some popular features provided by luxury hotels that could be applied to hospitals. These features go from simple ideas that are easy to apply to long term projects that need more in-depth analysis within each hospital. Nevertheless, all of them seek to contribute to the customer comfort and improve their overall satisfaction.

**Food**

- **24/7 Room Service**: the benefit for customers to control their food choices and the availability to order to their rooms at anytime. The room service should include a diverse menu for the patient’s companion and for those patients which their clinical condition allows them to eat different food than the standard menu provided by the hospital. It is recommended to design the menu essentially with healthy and organic options, considering the context. The room service could represent an additional income for the hospital, but it might also require additional personnel or extra work load for the kitchen. These aspects should be analyzed before offering this service, which in first instance is a great “plus” for customers. In fact, Sheehan-Smith’s (2006) study on hospitals showed that
hospitals that have incorporated hotel style room service have increased the patient satisfaction (as cited in Ziqi et al., 2013, p. 54).

- **Cafeteria:** usually every hospital has at least one restaurant or cafeteria for their employees and customers. The following recommendation goes specially directed to Ecuador’s’ hospitals by benchmarking what it has been seen in some institutions in the US. The suggestion is to design a cafeteria with different food stations: for example a salad-bar, grill, soda fountain and a sandwich station. In some stations the food is served by the staff and in others the customer can pick up directly from the display. This type of concept could help to improve the process cycle time of feeding customers while offering a customized service, and at the same time could save some HR costs. This type of concept is very popular among cruises and universities as well. The restaurant can decide to charge the customer according to either; the meal selected or can also ask an “all-you-can-eat” fee.

- **Restaurants:** in many hotels and hospitals the management of restaurants of the establishment is in concession/lease to third parties. This allows sharing the risk, while offering customers gourmet and contemporary food venue concepts. It is important to consider that the type of food offered in these restaurants should go in the same line with the overall hospital concept. That means hospitals should try to approve lease contracts for dining options that would contribute to the healthcare concept, for example restaurants with healthy menu options. According to Nico Digenmans, creator and founder at Health Cuisine, “it is vital to integrate in-house and outsourced planning and hospitality concept design into
the early inception stages of new hospitals; or (if the hospital is already in operation) to keep lease contracts renewable on a short-term basis, in order to ease change of tenants” (Dingemans, 2012).

**Rooms**

- *Room Management Technologies*: these technologies can regulate the ambiance of the room according to the guest preferences. Room key cards, tablets and all-in-one remote controls are example of devices that many luxury hotels around the world are using and that hospitals could imitate. For instance, lights, air conditioning, heat, curtains, TV and even the bed position are some of the tools that could be adjusted from a single device like a remote control, according to the patient preferences; which after all, seeks to enhance his or her satisfaction about the room.

- *Safe Box*: many hospitals have already included safe boxes in their rooms to secure customers’ belongings. Safe boxes should be of a reliable quality to avoid any surprises, and the master keys to open them should be restricted to a limited number of personnel.

- *Hospital Services Book*: the same as in hotels, hospitals should sum up their services in one main book located in the patient’s room. This type of books usually shows relevant telephone-extension numbers, significant services offered by the institution, among other important information for the customer.

- *Rooms Touch-Screen*: some hotels and now some hospitals are including individual touch screens at their patients’ rooms. Such is the case of Hospital
Metropolitano, where they have incorporated this device for their Elite suites. In these suites patients can utilize the touch screen to play games, connect to the Internet, call to nurses and even to check some of their medical results. This technological tool could be a great differentiator and it should be accompanied by a basic introductory training for customers and doctors. At the same time, each room should bring a simple “how-to-use manual,” since not everyone has the same ability to operate this type of technology.

- **International Calls:** the world is globalized and many hospitals don’t have yet long distance calls from the patient’s rooms. This service should be charged but definitely offered.

- **Internet:** same as long distance calls, some hospitals still don’t have internet hook up or Wi-Fi connections in patient’s rooms. Another feature that should be definitely consider in our times.

- **VIP suites:** several hospitals have incorporated private upscale rooms. These rooms can differentiate from the standard rooms by several aspects such as the furniture, additional entertainment (TV’s or touch screens) or a larger room space.

**Customer Service**

- **Butler / Concierge service:** now some hospitals have one or more people who are in charge of giving a special treatment to guests and help them to fulfill additional requirements to the medical ones. It is recommended to have one concierge per certain amount of rooms. For instance, Hospital Metropolitano
offers the concierge service only for their suites floor. In this case, the concierge is not “static” as in hotels, where they are usually waiting in the lobby for customer’s requests; instead this person is responsible to visit patients in their rooms at least once per day, constantly asking if there is anything they can do for them in order to improve their stay. A great differentiator to consider.

- **Executive lounges**: while certainly not appropriate in all cases, borrowing an idea from hotels and airports executive rooms, hospitals can offer upscale lounges in specific floors and offer a personalized service for selected patients; as has been done at the New York Presbyterian/Weill Gornell Medical Center’s (Ziqi et al., 2013).

- **Bellhop**: this feature is very common in luxury hotels and would give a first good impression if it’s applied into a hospital. The bellhops or bellboys are usually located on the main entrance of the building and are in charge of providing a warm welcome to customers, opening the door and assisting customers to get out from the car, as helping out with any luggage, wheel chairs or any other assistance they might need. The bellhop plays a fundamental role in a “moment of truth” which is the first impression of the customer when he or she arrives to the hospital.

- **Valet Parking**: this service complements the last point by making the entrance of customers to the hospital something more easy and comfortable. A simple way to generate some additional income while offering a five-stars service.
- **Check-out Express**: the idea of this type of service is to leave the hospital without the tedious process of having to go to the cashier, pay and close your bill. Instead, there are several processes that hotels usually apply, like sending a print-out of the bill to the customer’s room before they leave; if they agree they just need to sign the paper (or sometimes not even that).

**Entertainment and Additional Services**

- **Spa’s**: there is growing evidence that spa treatments such as massage or acupuncture can have benefits for health (SPAevidence). Therefore, including a spa in a hospital goes by hand with the core of the business. In addition, the spa services could be offered to the community in general, and not only for the hospital patrons. “Indiana University Health North Hospital and Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital have achieved substantial success in improving patients’ perceptions, profit margins, and patient referrals, after these hospitals incorporated spas that provided treatments specifically designed for patients (Osborn, 2005; Ology Spa, n.d.; Fierce Healthcare, 2008; Taylor, 2011 in Ziqi et al., 2013, p. 53). If there is no previous experience on the business, the operation and management of the spa could be assigned to a third party. However, prior to launch this type of service a profound analysis should be performed by the hospital management.

- **Classes**: In order to break out from the routine and give healthy and alternative services for customers and employees, hospitals can include a variety of programs like yoga, painting, dancing or cooking classes. This feature is probably one of the easiest to apply and can provide great results.
• **Gym:** Thinking on a larger scale, offering a gym on site could be a great additional service for customers and employees. The gym encourages wellbeing so it also goes along the same healthcare line as the hospital. Furthermore, it could also represent an additional income for the company. Alike as the SPA, the gym management or lease could be designated to a third party. In order to open a gym an in-depth analysis should be executed by the hospital management team.

• **Informative Touch Screens:** these become part of automation processes that could enable customers to find places, services or activities in the building without having interaction with an employee. This doesn’t mean that machines should replace the human customer service, but there are certain technological features like this one that could help to streamline the process. This service could be functional especially in big hospitals, placing the screens in strategic locations.

• **Game centers, libraries and art galleries:** hospitals should think in alternative entertainment facilities for patients and their families. Small libraries for reading and working, art galleries with continuous exhibitions, and game centers for children with educational activities or movies theaters, are only some example of entertainment options that could be included in hospitals. Research has shown that these types of “positive distractions” reduce pain and anxiety, among other desirable physiological outcomes. (Pati 2010 as cited in in Ziqi et al., 2013, p. 55).
For certain, there are other multiple hotel features that could be incorporated in healthcare institutions; however this list which is based on previous evidence could become a good starting point for managers who want to apply new hospitality elements in their hospitals.

**Design**

During the last years the hospital environment has changed with new and fresh design concepts that have been introduced in order to give patients and their families a warmer atmosphere. Some of them have taken inspiration from hotels’ design and architecture, understanding that their business goes beyond offering medical services to providing a hospitable ambiance centered on patients and families, although also considering their employees.

According to Dave Braucht, senior vice president for Madison’s Marshall Erdman & Associates (a planning, design and construction firm), “there is a real trend in the industry for the health care environment to move from being institutional to being much more inviting and warm” (as cited in Mader, 2003). Therefore, the goal is to change an intimidated institutional atmosphere (that hospitals can have) for a welcoming environment that looks for the comfort and relax of patrons.

Nowadays, it is important to understand the significance of hospital physical design not only to have an appealing appearance and differentiate from competitors, but according to Ziq. et al (2013) “increasingly, research evidence suggests the value of enhancing the physical environment to foster healing and drive consumer decisions and
perceptions of service quality." Therefore, a proper hospital environment does not only increase patients comfort, but it could reduce their stress levels which can contribute to the overall healing process.

To develop new design innovations in a hospital, it is important to start from a hospitality philosophy were patients are the top priority. For instance, the Lancaster Hospital, instead of having patient rooms with hospitality finishes, they visualized guest rooms with health amenities (Kraus and Jensen, 2010). An example, that the design they wanted to apply was part of an integral and broader concept.

There are multiple ways and forms to enhance hospitals designs by imitating innovations and standards from hotels. Ziqi et al. (2013) mentioned that some hospitals have moved beyond offering the comfort of private, single-patient rooms to providing luxury suites. For instance, the design of the new suites at Hospital Metropolitano was planned by one of the most renowned interior designers in Ecuador. Those rooms could easily make you feel as you are inside a five-star hotel. In addition, it is important for hospitals to think in special decoration and amenities for kids. Now, many hospitals have special bedcovers, robes and even special in-room entertainment adapted for them.

Other shift that some hospitals have chosen is to convert the patient’s single room, in a stay-over suite for the family members as well. One of the healthcare companies that have applied correctly this concept is Clínica y Maternidad Suizo Argentina. They changed the traditional model of hospital rooms for modern suites for patients and their families. These suites offer 2 different ambiances inside the same space. One room for the patient which include all the necessary medical equipment and other setting with a
comfortable living room for the family, where they can stay without disturbing while the patient rests or receives medical attention. “This allowed doctors and nurses to talk with the patient and his or her family together or separately, according to the situation and in ambiances with total privacy” (Clínica y Maternidad Suizo Argentina, n.d).

With respect to welcoming spaces, there’s no doubt we should think in the hospital main lobby, which sets the tone for the entire facility. “Many hospitals built or remodeled since the 1990s have been inspired by hotel design, in particular the idea of grand lobbies that incorporate atriums and other dramatic design elements” (Ziqi et al., 2013). If large designer atrium lobbies are not contemplated in the budget, including certain elements could contribute to give a sophisticated appearance, like for example art pieces, a grand piano or a small water fountain; small details can create a big difference. The same as lobbies, there are several other public spaces that could be transformed to provide a more comfortable and pleasant experience. Like the Lancaster Hospital and its design firm HKS, who envisioned waiting rooms as living rooms and the cafeteria as a restaurant-style dining area (Kraus and Jensen, 2010).

Another important aspect to consider in the design of a hospital is to have a friendly hotel-style signage as an easy way to find information, directions and tools. Hospitals usually use diverse color signs to distinguish the different areas and departments of the buildings; however that might not be enough. By benchmarking from luxury hotels, hospitals should consider using landmarks such as art pieces, ponds or clocks as orientation devices. In addition, technology is starting to play an important role with instructive tools like Informative Touch Screens, as mentioned in the previous section.
Furthermore, while hospitals look for appealing designs that are cost effective, they also have the challenge to design facilities that are functional and capable of accommodating spaces according to the demand. Hospitals can now utilize flexible and expandable innovations in the rooms like foldable walls or foldout sofa beds, which can expand the dimensions and increase functionality of a room (Ziqi et al., 2013).

Delving into the interior design of a hospital there are several elements that could be easily imitated from five stars hotels, creating a more relaxed and stylish atmosphere. Not all hospitals may have the budget to redesign all its facilities but there are other and multiple design elements that could be easily applied while maintaining low costs. Mader, 2003 provides some suggestions of simple changes that can be made when designing or re-designing a hospital that can help creating a better atmosphere:

- Install more lamps rather than overhead lighting to provide a more relaxed feel
- Change the typical nurse station for an area that could appear much like a hotel concierge
- Mount upholstery with a softer pattern. The visitors’ seating area could include small sleeper couch or upholstered chairs
- Install shaded lamps, wallpaper, draperies and framed paintings
- Design bathrooms with colored fixtures, decorative tile and roll-in showers.

Actually, some of these elements have been applied to hospitals like the Cleveland Clinic Florida Hospital. Geoffrey Moebius, the hospital administrator, explained “we’ve taken it to the level of a five-star hotel” (Mader, 2003). This is only a small list of suggestions of several other changes that can be done; however the main point is to
understand that small variations in the design can create big differences in the physical environment of a hospital.

The Ranken Jordan—A Pédiatrie Specialty Hospital in Missouri is one of the hospitals that decided to integrate hospitality-like features to their design. Laurren K. Tanner stated: “Although our original focus in the design of the facility was solely to create a healing environment for our patients, we have seen the difference that the facility’s design makes in perceptions and in the comfort level of families...” Laurren is the president and CEO of The Ranken Jordan and his experience confirms that there is value in improving the physical environment of the hospital to foster healing and enhance the perceptions of service quality (Laurren in Ziqi et al., 2013, p.63).

When planning the design or redesign of a hospital, many concepts could be imitated and inspired from luxury hotels. Nevertheless, management should consider that it’s necessary not only to “dress up” the facilities to make them look nice, but that behind any implementation there should be a focus on guests and employees. That focus should be part of a larger and integral philosophy of a hospitality-oriented culture in the health care institution. In addition, evidence suggests that improving the physical environment could help the patient’s recovering process. Therefore, inserting hospitality design concepts could potentially provide additional benefits at the own core of these institutions.
Customer Service

Kraus and Jensen (2010) stated that 90% of what establishes the difference between a two-star hotel and a five-star hotel is service. In hospitals, adding new hotel characteristics and the latest architectural designs would be useless if it is not balanced by the right customer service from the staff. It would not make sense to have magnificent lobbies, beautiful rooms or tasty dinner menus if they are not aligned adequately to an efficient and friendly service provided by employees; mainly of those who are in direct contact with patients, also called front line employees. Therefore, it is not only important to provide innovative features and top of the notch design elements, but it is essential (and even more important) to focus on processes and operations towards offering a high quality service.

Etzkorn (2010) author of the article Why hospitals need to be in the hospitality business, explained “gradually the medical community has realized that the majority of the hospital experience is made up of numerous mundane moments rather than the surgical procedures or medical tests.” The mundane moments she mentioned refers to all those ordinary moments that a patient experiences in a hospital, like how quick a nurse responds to a patient call, how attentive are the doctors and caregivers, the availability of food on request, or how easy is the check in/out process. There are hundreds of ordinary moments in a health care institution that dictate the experience and finally build up the customer satisfaction. To address and provide efficient and consistent service on every moment, the employee training is essential.

Customer service training programs can help to create a hospitality-oriented culture in the hospital. In this attempt, several health institutions have closed deals with hospitality
experts such as the Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts and the Ritz-Carlton Hotels, known as two of the most prestigious hotel chains in the world for its famous customer service and luxury facilities. The Ritz has provided lessons to employees of health institutions like the Erlanger Health System in Chattanooga, Stanford University Medical Center, New York Presbyterian Hospital, among others (Cheung-Larivee, 2011).

The construction of a hospitality-culture is a process based on a defined concept and service strategy that should be aligned to the organizational structure. It is critical for management to clearly design job descriptions, identify proper reporting lines, and define the performance criteria and levels of autonomy (Dingenmans, 2012). Therefore, when meeting hospitality with the health-care design, a hospitable culture is the base for having a warmer and more comforting environment for internal and external customers.

Hospitals the same as hotels provide multiple services which most of the time are intangible, difficult to standardize, and simultaneously produced-consumed. Therefore, the human component is crucial and the strategies not only to train, but also to maintain happy employees would probably determine the success of an organization. Hospitals should constantly look towards good labor conditions and committed employees. A hospital that has looked to improve its employee's environment is Clínica y Maternidad Suizo-Argentina. The Hospitality Manager, Yolonda Beloycott, mentioned that they have thought not only in patients but also in their employees comfort, believing that well treated workers would take care of patients in the same way. As a result they implemented a whole floor with facilities such as pool, gym, library and snack bar; all for the hospital staff (as cited in Urquiza, 2005, p. 9).
Employees’ empowerment should also be encouraged in hospitals, especially on those who have direct contact with the customers. Like in the Griffin Hospital in Connecticut where the staff is authorized to make decisions and take actions within their area of expertise based on the best interest of the patient (Daft, 2008); or like the Arnold Palmer Hospital where employees are trained to take care of patients displeased and empowered to give them some type of gifts to manage the situation. (Heizer & Render, 2011)

However, the hospitality-focus transformation in a hospital begins with the leaders and a large portion of the hospitality goals and strategies should be decided and understood starting from the board-level. Moreover, the hospital top management has the fundamental role of defining a proper organizational structure and the way to align both, the hospital managers and the hospitality managers, within the same organization. For instance, in Germany some hospitals have two General Managers: one medical GM and one hospitality GM (Dingenmans, 2012). Leaders with hospitality experience and that understand the importance of service are a key element to get a hospitable team. The hospitality leader and his or her team has to work by hand with the medical manager and his or her team in order to get the same “essence” of quality service on all the daily moments that built up the customer experience.

Kraus and Jensen (2010) explained a new approach of how to treat patients in healthcare institutions. This method visualizes the hospital patient as a guest first, which permits to design attitudes focused on enhancing the guest experience. “While patients are something to be processed, guests are to be treated and are with you a short while.”
(Kraus and Jensen, 2010). This vanguard vision permits to see customers not only as patients that need to be healed, but as guests that should be well treated.

As Dingenmans (2012) mentioned “hospitality with a soul is not about the ‘hardware’, it's about the people, the ‘software.’” Therefore, when integrating hospitality and healthcare it is necessary to go further than just the features and design. Luxury hotels are normally renowned for their first-class service; hence if there is something in particular that hospitals would like to imitate from these types of hotels, is their customer service vocation.
Conclusion

There is a global trend in which healthcare and hospitality are working ever closer as well as growing together. On one hand, it is not unusual to see more hotels regularly adopting healthy options and services that enhance their guests’ wellbeing. On the other hand, hospitals are imitating many of the hotels’ practices and features to improve their patient’s satisfaction. Hence, it is not a coincidence that the words hospital and hotel come from the same Latin root “hospes” (guest). However the connection between both industries goes further; hospitals and hotels share many operational characteristics along with their main goal of getting highly satisfied customers.

Under these circumstances, hotels have several elements that could be replicated in hospitals as well as different ways to apply them according to the specific uniqueness of each institution. This paper was developed in an effort to encourage hospitals managers in Ecuador and worldwide to look beyond their clinical services and implement hotel concepts and services for the benefit of their patients.

Multiple hospitality areas and hotel elements could be applied to hospitals, aside from this article’s afore mentioned ones. However, the important aspect to consider is that all these services, features and applications should always be aligned with a common philosophy centered on customer care and grounded in a strong organizational-culture.

Adding new hotel services and improving their appearance could hardly reach full potential, if they are not properly aligned with an exceptional customer service provided by employees. Therefore, management should prioritize the implementation of training
programs and good labor conditions in order to get highly motivated and hospitable teams, capable of treating customers not only as patients but also as guests.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that hospitals' top priority should always be its clinical excellence. In any case, based on continuous improvement processes, these health-care institutions should strive to constantly enhance their overall customer experience. Here is exactly where managers may find room to provide augmented and differentiated services by including hospitality elements that could not only improve patients’ comfort and satisfaction, but that could also contribute to the latter’s healing process. The hotel elements explained within this paper could serve as an initial reference point to implement these changes.
References


