Floored!

Latest products respond to health care trends

 interiors

By Jeff Ferenc

Hospitals have higher expectations for new flooring these days. They want slip-resistant, natural-looking, soft and easy-to-clean materials. Manufacturers are rising to the occasion with a host of moderately priced products that give hospitals more colorful choices than ever.

That’s quite a challenge. But it’s one that manufacturers continue to work at meeting as they develop flooring that reflects the latest trends and growing customer demands. The result is an array of products, including rubber, vinyl sheet flooring, polyurethane, linoleum and terrazzo, that serve as alternatives to the old standard vinyl composition tile (VCT).

Long-term performance

Regardless of the material, most hospitals want flooring that offers long-term durability and low maintenance, according to manufacturers, designers and green building advocates interviewed by Health Facilities Management.

Those are the factors facility managers, designers and specifiers need to consider first when purchasing or recommending floor products, says Dave Harris, sales manager, commercial division, R.C.A. Rubber Co., Akron, Ohio.

“R.C.A. makes FlexiPlex rubber flooring, which is comprised of synthetic and natural rubbers and clay and offers long life, low maintenance and strong slip-resistance benefits, he says. Those benefits are cause for the growing popularity of rubber flooring in health care facilities.

“The most important thing right now for flooring as a benefit to hospitals is a true no-finish maintenance procedure, where all they do is clean the floor as needed and buff it,” says Harris. With rubber flooring, “hospitals do not need to apply extraneous sealers or waxes, which saves labor needed for applying and removing finishes,” he says.

Eliminating the need to strip and wax floors as with VCT also keeps volatile organic compounds (VOCs) out of the air and the waste stream, Harris says.

Jeremy Whipple, marketing manager of Roppe Corp., Hudson, Ohio, and sister company, Flexco Corp., Tuscumbia, Ala., agrees that rubber flooring is gaining in popularity.

“Rubber products are typically double the cost of VCT flooring, the cost of VCT adds up quickly after factoring in maintenance. Whipple says. “If a hospital has a facility manager that is forward-looking, he will do a test floor and determine what the maintenance costs are for that floor. He will find out that dollar per square foot for VCT isn’t that cheap when it costs you $2 per square foot to maintain it.”

Robin Guenther, FAIA, a principal at Perkins+Will, also says that low-maintenance flooring that is less chemically intensive in the cleaning process is an important factor for hospitals purchasing new flooring. It improves indoor air quality and cuts maintenance costs, she says.

Comfort and sound absorption are additional factors in making it green.

The natural resources used in linoleum flooring, such as in the pediatric inpatient unit at the Manhattan Medical Center, Brooklyn, N.Y., make it the choice for a number of applications. Forbo Flooring Systems NA

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choosing flooring such as rubber or linoleum, Gunther says. “Hospitals are looking for softer, more cushioned flooring for occupational safety and health reasons. Hospitals are trying to find flooring that is more ergonomic and cushions people’s feet and legs from the hardness of the concrete slabs that are generally underneath the flooring surface,” she says.

Rich Campbell, executive vice president, sales and marketing, Ecore International, Lancaster, Pa., echoes the belief that “a durable, long-lasting flooring product that is easy to maintain” such as rubber and linoleum flooring products are gaining in popularity.

Rubber and linoleum flooring products are gaining in POPULARITY.

Rubber and linoleum are top priorities for many hospitals. The company’s ECOsurfaces Commercial Flooring makes it easy to transport rolling loads and offers sound dampening characteristics, both important features for hospitals, he says. Linoleum is also gaining in popularity with health care facilities. Forbo Flooring Systems, Hazleton, Pa., makes a product called Marmoleum that is the company’s trademarked name for linoleum surfaces,” she says. Paul Eanes, vice president of sales, Amtrico.

West Coast-based health care system giant Kaiser Permanente likes Stratica so much that in 2004 the health organization mandated the installation of either Stratica or rubber flooring in all of its new or renovated health care facilities. The goal was to improve patient and staff safety by reducing the number of falls and slips that was costing Kaiser Permanente millions of dollars in compensation, according to the summary of a resilient-flooring white paper the health care organization issued in May 2009. The new flooring also eliminated the need for cleaning chemicals used with prior vinyl products. Just like home While perhaps not the highest priority in choosing products, the trend to make hospitals as “homey” and comfortable as possible through interior design continues to grow. Manufacturers have adapted their products to fill this need by expanding color lines and offering products that mimic natural elements such as stone or wood. “Flexibility and function are key components of design in hospitals,” says Michael Raskin, president and CEO, Metroflor Corp., Danien, Conn., which makes low maintenance, slip resistant and anti-bacterial sheet vinyl and vinyl planks and tiles that resemble wood grain. The trend toward warmer colors and natural-looking flooring and increasingly in single-patient rooms reflects what hospitals see as desirable for their patients. "Patients prefer not to share rooms and would prefer to have their own rooms, but
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