From Fantasy to Reality: A Four-Part Formula for Behavioral Health Patient Safety

As cultural, business and regulatory pressures create a greater need for behavioral health facilities, more hospitals consider adding the service line. However, the unique treatment and security needs of this patient population call for a very different view of risk factors and patient safety. Specialty hospitals are responding to new behavioral treatment models with facilities that offer normalizing environments via less obvious security measures, access to the outdoors, smaller group meeting and dining areas, and normal daily activities. With creative planning and design, more traditional hospital settings can adapt their existing facilities to accommodate these measures.

This poster will present a four-part formula for assessing a hospital’s opportunities and challenges in creating an effective and secure behavioral health unit. First, we will address how to establish policies for this service line. Next, we will examine how spaces can be designed to support current clinical approaches through the use of low, medium and high risk/observation zones. We will make the theory more concrete through a discussion of exciting new approaches to creating safe environments through the use of materials, natural light, technology, view lines and thresholds, shifting occupancy patterns, and integration of indoor and outdoor environments into a single cohesive treatment environment. Finally, we will provide real-world information about best practices, benchmarking, and a recent case study of a community hospital that successfully added a behavioral health service line.

Additional Presenters

James Kent Muirhead, AIA, Associate Principal
Cannon Design

Tonia E. Burnette, RA, Principal
Cannon Design