BARIATRIC DESIGN
Recommended Weight Limits, Sizes and Procedures

June, 2005
Rev. Sept., 2005

ISSUES

MCA recognizes that Americans are growing larger and that spaces should be designed for the comfort of a range of users. Of more specific concern to hospitals are increasing numbers of bariatric patients with special needs. In order to accommodate users of many sizes, MCA provides recommendations for three kinds of spaces.

Bariatric-Friendly recommendations should be used in all public spaces and all inpatient units, simply to provide safe, comfortable and usable options for all patients and visitors.

Bariatric-Adaptable recommendations are for a select number of rooms that would ordinarily be used for regular patients but can easily be adapted to accommodate larger patients with special bariatric needs.

Bariatric-Dedicated recommendations are to be used only for spaces dedicated to the care and treatment of bariatric patients with highly specialized needs.

Hospitals should consider their patient populations and decide whether and how to include Bariatric-Adaptable and Bariatric-Dedicated spaces in their facilities. MCA recommends that Bariatric-Friendly measure be used universally in all hospitals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bariatric-Friendly Spaces

- Seating should include options wider than standard chairs, such as loveseats and benches.
- Floor-mounted water closets should be used, in all locations, whether specified bariatric or not.
- All water closets should be installed at 17" (low ADA height).
- All toilet room doors should be a minimum of 3'-8" wide.
- All public toilet room stalls should be large enough to accommodate bariatric visitors: we recommend 3'-6" wide x 5' deep.
- All toilet tissue dispensers should be located according to ADA regulations.
- Each inpatient unit should store a portable patient lift in its equipment storage room.
- Inpatient rooms should be a minimum of 14' from head to foot, and should allow a 4' clearance on both sides of the patient bed.
- Inpatient rooms should have 100% outboard toilets.
- All inpatient toilet/shower rooms should be a minimum of 45 square feet.
- All inpatient showers (typically in a universal toilet room configuration) should be large enough to accommodate the patient being assisted by up to two caregivers/attendants.
- All inpatient showers should provide a removable, not built-in, shower seat and hand-held showerhead to allow flexibility in washing. The showerhead should be mounted on a bar that allows the patient to adjust the height, so it can be reached from a sitting or standing position.
- Portable shower and toilet seats should safely support at least 400 pounds. The built-in standard shower seat supports only 250 pounds. Edmond Wheelchair Repair and Supply offers an Invacare Bariatric Commode Chair with a 700-pound capacity.
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Bariatric-Adaptable Spaces

- All of the Bariatric-Friendly recommendations, plus:
- Grab bars in all bariatric spaces should be floor-mounted with a bracket attaching them to the wall.
- Bariatric-adaptable toilet rooms/stalls should offer a floor-mounted vertical bar extending higher on the wall than typical grab bars, so that bariatric patients can use them to pull themselves up.
- Water closets should be positioned 21" to center from the wall, not the standard 18".
- Toilet/shower rooms should have a bariatric commode chair specified on its equipment list. This applies not only to patient toilet/shower rooms but also to any toilet with an extra-wide door to accommodate bariatric wheelchairs.
- Doors into Bariatric-Adaptable inpatient rooms must be a minimum of 4'-0" wide with a 1'-0" extra leaf, to accommodate wider stretchers.
- Bariatric-Adaptable inpatient rooms should provide ceiling-mounted lifts that extend from the corridor wall, across the room, and into the toilet/shower room.
- A structural engineer should take the lead on support systems for bariatric lifts, as well as providing extra horizontal and vertical structural reinforcement for all fixtures and architectural woodwork.
- Bariatric-adaptable inpatient rooms should be large enough to allow 5' clearance at the end and on both sides of a bariatric-sized bed.

Bariatric-Dedicated Rooms

- All of the Bariatric-Friendly and Bariatric-Adaptable recommendations, plus these. Note that some of the recommendations in this section over-ride the recommendations given in the sections for more general-use rooms.
- Bariatric-Dedicated inpatient rooms should provide a minimum 15' headwall and 14' distance from head-to-foot.
- All accessories and finishes must be designed to support extra weight and width.
- Doors into Bariatric-Dedicated toilet/shower rooms, as well as into the patient room from the corridor, should be a minimum of 4'-0" wide with a 1'-0" leaf.
- Specify a dedicated bariatric toilet, such as the Great John Commercial toilet by the Great John Toilet Co., which provides a larger seating area and supports up to 2,000 pounds.
- Consider the location of the toilet paper dispenser, based on the size of the toilet, locations of grab bars, and room configuration.
- Consider installing a bidet.
- Consider including a dialysis connection.
- Consider providing bedside thermostat control for the patient.

JUSTIFICATION

- Bariatric patients’ excess weight leads to additional safety and liability concerns, which special equipment can help to allay.
- Much of the available bariatric equipment is new, relatively untested and continues to evolve. It is important to monitor availability and carefully maintain safety standards.

Marshall Craft Associates’ healthcare design experts take positions based on years of experience and dozens of post-occupancy reviews with healthcare professionals and patients. These recommendations are intended as supplements to code requirements in individual jurisdictions. We hope our research and recommendations will help inform your facility’s decision-making process.