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Season 5 Recap eBook

Healthcare Facilities: Today's Challenges, Tomorrow's Solutions

*by Mackenna Morales, Managing Editor
and Facilities in Focus Podcast Host*



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Doctors and nurses get a lot, if not most, of the credit for keeping patients safe and healthy, but so many other people in healthcare facilities strive to provide the best possible care for all patients. Behind the scenes, the facilities team works at all times to ensure healthcare facilities achieve the highest standards. They monitor HVAC systems, change filters and quite literally keep the lights on. Healthcare facilities management is an unforgiving job. One mistake can have a detrimental effect on operations. The whole facility could

shut down, the bottom line could suffer – or even worse, someone could die.

Healthcare facility managers are the backbone of healthcare facilities and a large part of the reason why they continue to operate. Without them, patients would not receive the best possible care.

The following e-book consists of synopsis of episodes from the fifth season of Facilities in Focus podcast. This is brought to you by ABM, Orkin and Pointcore.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable: Inside the NICU



SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital leaders share how maintaining power, air quality and essential systems helps protect patients during their most vulnerable moments.

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When families enter a hospital, their focus is naturally on the doctors, nurses and clinical staff providing care. Yet every successful patient outcome also depends on another group working quietly behind the scenes: the facility management professionals responsible for maintaining the environment where care takes place.

In the season premiere of *Facilities in Focus*, host and managing editor of *FacilitiesNet* Mackenna Moralez sits down with Bruce Legris, power plant manager, and Daniel Wagner, manager

of plant operations. at SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. The conversation is especially personal for Moralez, whose son spent three weeks in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) after being born prematurely. While the experience was emotionally overwhelming, she was able to view the hospital through the lens of a facility management journalist, recognizing the immense amount of behind-the-scenes work required to keep patients safe.

The NICU is one of the most demanding environments for healthcare facility professionals. It houses some of the most fragile patients imaginable – premature and critically ill newborns whose survival depends on stable environmental conditions. For the facilities team, there is absolutely no margin for error.

For the plant operations team, maintaining these systems isn't about simply meeting regulatory requirements or completing maintenance schedules. Every decision is made with patients in mind. Legris explains that whenever issues arise within the power plant, his first thought is about the infants that depend on

uninterrupted power and carefully controlled environmental conditions.

"When anything happens critical on our side with the power plant, there's little ones on the other side of the road that we've got to worry about and make sure their power is on all the time," Legris says.

Wagner emphasizes the emotional significance that parents feel in the NICU. Hospitals are often associated with illness, trauma and loss, but neonatal care represents hope and new beginnings. Knowing this, the facilities team reinforces that every maintenance task contributes to creating an environment where families can focus on welcoming a new child instead of worrying about the building around them.

"Hospitals aren't really known for the greatest of reasons, but when we bring in kids, it's supposed to be uplifting," Wagner says.

Healthcare facility management extends well beyond maintaining equipment, though. The work directly influences patient safety, family experiences and the ability of clinical staff to deliver exceptional care. Every preventive maintenance task, infrastructure upgrade and emergency preparedness

effort contributes to creating an environment where physicians and nurses can focus entirely on patients.

In healthcare, operational excellences carry a deeply human purpose. Systems that are managed by the facilities team are largely invisible when functioning properly, but they become the foundation upon which quality care is built. Facility professionals are working behind the scenes to ensure every successful procedure, every healthy discharge and every family can be reunited with their loved ones. While the work may often go unseen, its impact is immeasurable.

*To listen to the full episode of **Facilities in Focus**, please [click here](#).*



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The Future of Accessibility in Senior Care Facilities



It is commonplace for accessibility to be viewed only as a matter of compliance, but to Joan Stein of Stein Consulting, it needs to be viewed as a long-term investment for the future of the built environment. In this episode of Facilities in Focus, Mackenna Moralez, host and managing editor of FacilitiesNet, sits down with Stein to discuss how senior care facility managers can move beyond simply meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and instead create spaces that are welcoming, functional and adaptable for people throughout every stage of life.

Facility professionals need to think more proactively than reactively about accessibility. Demographics are rapidly shifting as the population ages, creating an increasing demand for senior care facilities that better support independence, mobility and dignity. Stein explains that rather than

As America's population ages, the conversation around accessibility is becoming impossible to ignore.

treating accessibility as just an item to check off on a to-do list, facility professionals should incorporate universal design principles into long-term planning, renovations and new construction projects.

Stein also challenges the traditional definition of aging in place. While many people associate the concept with modifying an existing home, she argues that isn't always realistic. Instead, thoughtfully designed communities can provide a better solution by offering accessible environments that still feel like home rather than a clinical, healthcare setting.

"I'm a baby boomer and we are not aging gracefully," Stein says. "We

are not going to put up with what our parents put up with. Us baby boomers – and those coming behind us – are not only going to demand it, but you're (future generations) going to demand it instantly and through an app. My dream, though, is that senior care facilities don't look like a hospital or a hospital room. It's beautiful and accessible and not cost prohibitive."

Meanwhile, high-quality assisted living facilities often come with significant costs, highlighting the importance of planning for future accessibility needs. Balancing affordability with accessibility and care will become an increasingly important challenge. Managers who embrace these evolving expectations will

be better positioned to create resilient, inclusive spaces that remain relevant for decades.

Accessibility is about far more than compliance – it's about designing environments where people of all ages and abilities can live, work and thrive. As facilities continue to evolve alongside changing demographics, accessibility – especially within senior care facilities – will remain one of the defining considerations shaping the future of building design and facility management.

To listen to the full episode of Facilities in Focus, please [click here](#).

The Future of Healthcare Construction and Facility Management



Short description: Behind every successful hospital, university or large facility is a team solving problems most people never see.

Facility renovations often focus on schedules, budgets and construction miles, but a true measure of success is if occupants can continue with their everyday lives with minimal disruption. Brian Cowperthwaite, vice president of facilities and operations at the Medical College of Wisconsin, believes the most valuable tools in a facility manager's toolbox aren't necessarily a wrench or a

blueprint, but rather communication, preparation and adaptability.

Cowperthwaite's job isn't easy. Managing construction on an active academic medical campus requires balancing countless priorities. Laboratories simply cannot stop operating, researchers depend on controlled environments and students need spaces that support the learning environment every day of the year. He explains that projects begin long before demolition begins as they need to best understand how people use the space and identify every possible challenge, whether it be utility shutdowns to vibration to dust and traffic flow.

Facility leaders should involve building occupants, contractors and maintenance teams throughout every stage of a project. Daily check-ins, regular updates and collaborative planning allow projects to adapt around teaching schedules, research activities and operational needs before conflicts arise. Cowperthwaite argues that interpersonal skills are just as important as facility professionals spend so much of their time coordinating people, solving conflicts and aligning multiple departments behind a common goal.

"I always think if I had unlimited money and unlimited time and no schedule,

people would still be mad," says Cowperthwaite, who was profiled in a recent *Building Operating Management* cover story. "You've really got to bring people together, break the silos and talk to them. You're going to do things that not everybody loves, so explain it to them. It's a lot of communication. It's soft skills, and you wouldn't think that with facilities – it's all technical, wrench turning or programming, but it's a lot of interpersonal skills."

Still, no renovation is ever perfect. Unexpected issues will occur, whether it's a triggered fire alarm, construction dust or unforeseen building conditions. Cowperthwaite recommends preparing contingency plans that prioritize life safety, utilities and business continuity while maintaining transparency with building occupants.

Construction projects are not just about improving buildings; they are about creating environments where people can perform their best. By combining thoughtful planning with empathy and continuous communication, facility leaders can deliver renovations that strengthen both their facilities and the people who depend on them.

To listen to the full episode of Facilities in Focus, please [click here](#).

Why Healthcare Facilities Management Is Critical to Patient Safety



For healthcare facility managers, compliance is often viewed through the lens of regulations, inspections and documentation. But Yanet Vega, director of facilities and environmental services at El Rio Health, believes that compliance is so much more than just checking boxes. It is a continuous commitment to patient safety, communication and proactive risk management.

Many of the most important aspects of healthcare facilities management happen behind the scenes. Patients rarely see the backflow testing, fire inspections, preventive maintenance or overnight repair work that keeps healthcare environments operating safely. Yet, these invisible tasks directly influence patient outcomes and an organization's ability to provide care.

Short description: Hospitals and other healthcare facilities rely on much more than doctors and nurses to keep patients safe.

"Compliance is patient safety – even when it's invisible," Vega says. "It's a major factor in healthcare because that could potentially lead to closing a building or somebody getting hurt. It's never going to be immediate to the eye, it's just behind the scenes, but it's important that it's done."

While regulations establish minimum standards, successful facility managers know that meeting code requirements isn't enough. Vega suggests that they evaluate how spaces are actually used and identify emerging risks and solve problems long before they become safety incidents.

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In addition, communication is also one of the most valuable – and often overlooked – tools. She explains that effective communication extends far beyond work orders, but that it also includes educating building occupants, keeping staff informed about repairs, coordinating vendors and helping users understand why certain policies exist. When communication breaks down, even small maintenance issues can bloom into larger safety concerns.

“Communication is everything because it’s everybody’s time and it’s money,” Vega says. “It’s (healthcare facilities management) not just something where you can just say ‘I’m sorry’ because ‘I’m sorry’ could cost millions of dollars or lives. The reality is anything could go wrong, and yes, you’re there to fix it, but most importantly, to create safety. It’s important everyone understands and gives them an explanation. Educating and communicating what’s happening, even if it’s not something that you understand, gives you the ease of ‘this is what it is and this is what was done.’”

In healthcare settings, regulatory failures can result in fines, lost accreditation, interrupted reimbursements and, in severe cases, the inability to continue providing patient care. Compliance is therefore not simply a facilities

responsibility – it is an organizational responsibility that directly affects business continuity.

When it comes down to it, healthcare facilities management is fundamentally about protecting the people in the building. Compliance is not an administrative burden, but a critical component of delivering safe, high-quality patient care. Success depends on collaboration, continuous learning and a willingness to look beyond the checklist to understand the bigger picture.

To listen to the full episode of Facilities in Focus, please [click here](#).

Inside One of Healthcare’s Most Ambitious Hospital Projects



What does it really take to build a hospital that won’t feel outdated before it even opens?

That’s the real question that is driving the development of the UT Dell Medical Center at the University of Texas Austin Specialty Hospital. The 2.5 million-square-foot academic medical center is expected to welcome its first patients in 2030, and has given healthcare facility managers the rare opportunity to start with a blank slate. Typically, in a healthcare setting, organizations have to renovate aging infrastructures, but leaders are taking a fundamentally different approach.

In this episode of Facilities in Focus, Travis Laird, a key leader behind the UT Dell Medical Center, shares how his team is designing a next-generation academic medical center from the ground up by creating an intelligent

When someone faces a serious medical condition, having access to world-class care close to home can make all the difference.

healthcare environment where artificial intelligence, automation, robotics and data are woven into every aspect of the facility. With the addition of new and emerging technologies, the goal isn’t to replace people, rather eliminate unnecessary complexity so clinicians can spend more time caring for patients.

“We have the opportunity to look at every single component and part that goes into delivering world-class healthcare, break it down, and reconstruct it in a way that fits the purpose of this facility,” Laird says. “Ultimately, we want the building to be an intelligent and intuitive member of the care team. It needs to be anticipatory, proactive and really give

back our clinicians the time and space to do what they like to do, which is take care of patients.”

Every design decision is evaluated through four guiding principles:

- Improving quality and safety
- Enhancing the patient, visitor and caregiver experience
- Increasing operational efficiency
- Advancing the organization’s academic mission

The framework keeps technology focused on solving real operational challenges instead of becoming technology for technology’s sake.

Facility managers will also benefit from greater operational visibility. Instead of working with old, disconnected systems, future facilities teams will be able to receive integrated insights combining building automation, maintenance schedules and more. This connected approach allows teams to better anticipate problems rather than just reacting to them.

One message remains clear: technology needs to support people – not replace them. Whether designing quieter patient rooms, reducing caregiver burnout or streamlining facility

operations, every innovation is intended to strengthen the human side of healthcare.

“Ultimately, our big thing here is putting patients first,” Laird says. “That’s the North Star. All the decisions we make focus on putting the patient at the center of all of our decision making, our thought process, how we conduct research, how we educate medical students and residents – all of the things that go into the world-class institutions across the globe today.”

While few organizations have the opportunity to build from scratch, every capital project presents a chance to question long-held assumptions. By designing for flexibility, embracing data-driven decision making, and keeping end users at the center of every choice, today’s facilities can remain resilient for years to come.

[*To listen to the full episode of Facilities in Focus, please click here.*](#)

Every Detail Matters: A Patient’s Story of Healing, Hope, and Healthcare Facilities



Healthcare facility managers rarely meet every patient whose experience they influence. Yet every decision they make helps shape how patients remember their time in the hospital.

What makes a hospital a truly healing experience? The answer often isn’t found in medical technology alone. According to Kendalynn, an 11-year-old patient at Intermountain Primary Children’s Hospital in Utah and her mother Karissa, it’s the spaces that make difficult days feel just a little more manageable. No one understands this more than Kendalynn as she has lived with a rare gastrointestinal disorder since infancy and has spent much of her life in the hospital.

Healthcare facilities are much more than places where medical care happens. Every design decision, maintenance task and support service contributes to the healing environment. Karissa recalls how overwhelming the hospital initially felt. The unfamiliar sounds, constant activity and uncertainty added to the

immense stress she was already feeling as her daughter underwent testing and treatment. Over time, the environment transformed into a place of comfort because of members of the hospital community – from nurses and physicians all the way to environmental services staff and facility teams – worked together to create a safe, dependable space.

“When a family walks through the doors of Primary Children’s, they are often walking in on one of the very hardest days,” Karissa says. “They’re carrying us, as families, we’re carrying fear and exhaustion and so much uncertainty. We (parents) have an unrecognizable amount of love for our child, and we’re willing to do whatever we can to fight for them. When you are in that space of a hospital, every single detail matters. The way the room feels, the way people walk in and say hello, the availability of the staff and just having people there who recognize and love your child for who they are is one of the most impactful things.”

“There have been moments where I felt completely overwhelmed with our journey and our experience and what we’re going through, but having these

people show up and see her as she is, and as we are together, as our little team helps the days pass and helps her in her healing journey.”

For families, there is a strong importance for emotional well-being alongside clinical care, and this can be done through design. Kendalynn looks forward to visiting the art therapy room, music therapy, library, playroom and garden during her inpatient stays. These areas provide opportunities to escape the clinical environment, express creativity and simply feel like a “normal” child again.

Meanwhile, patient rooms also play a significant role. Rather than preferring heavily decorated walls, Kendalynn appreciates having blank spaces where she can display her artwork, creating a personalized environment during extended stays. Her mother highlights the importance of natural daylight, ample storage and flexible room layouts that allow families to settle in comfortably during weeks or months of hospitalization.

“I like how empty the walls are,” Kendalynn says. “I like that there’s lots of curves in the walls and how empty they are. So, I’m like ‘Okay, art there, art there, art over here. Some on the ceiling now.’ At the end we give it (the artwork) all away to the nurses.”

Reliable HVAC systems, clean air, comfortable temperatures, functioning elevators and well-maintained rooms rarely get the proper credit. Behind-the-scenes efforts directly influence patient comfort, recovery and trust. Even seemingly minor issues like poor water pressure in the shower or limited quiet spaces for caregivers can have a significant impact on family well-being during prolonged hospital stays. For healthcare facility managers, every maintenance request that is completed, every lighting decision, every noise reduction effort and every thoughtfully designed space contributes to patient healing. While families may never know the names of the people that are maintaining the buildings, they experience the results of that work every day.

Hospitals and other healthcare facilities can become temporary homes during someone’s most vulnerable moments. The responsibility that healthcare facility managers face extends far beyond keeping systems operational. It means creating environments where patients can heal, endure difficult journeys and hope can flourish alongside excellent medical care.

To listen to the full episode of Facilities in Focus, please [click here](#).

