

Anticipating the Needs of The Evolving Healthcare Landscape

By Allyson Rider



In the past decade, healthcare services have undergone a significant shift, propelled by the evolving patient needs and shifting care delivery models. Behavioral health has emerged as a priority, driving new models of care and design. At the same time, population growth is increasing demand for inpatient capacity, forcing providers to consider additional beds or novel outpatient approaches. Looking further ahead, changes in artificial intelligence and robotics are going to further reshape the healthcare landscape, including not only care, but also the way mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems are implemented in modern hospitals.

Healthcare construction is driven by population growth and aging generations. In Georgia, this has translated into the expansion of hospitals by adding floors, beds, and additional facilities to meet that demand. At the same time, healthcare systems have been shifting services beyond the traditional hospital setting and into medical office buildings (MOBs), enabling more convenient, outpatient-focused care models.

As a result, MOBs have evolved over the past decade. These facilities are no longer limited to basic clinical services but are increasingly equipped with advanced, specialized technologies like MRI machines once reserved for hospitals. This shift reflects a broader industry trend toward patient-focused care delivery.

In Florida, the trend is the same though the strategy is different with the emergence of free-standing emergency departments (FSEDs). Rather than expanding hospital campuses alone, health systems have extended emergency services directly into communities, improving access and reducing travel times for patients.

With this increased investment, Batson-Cook serves as a valuable partner in helping healthcare systems expand and adapt to patient needs. Through a collaborative preconstruction process, the team evaluates multiple design options and project scenarios to present the best value with each project, improve cost efficiency, and create environments that better support patient care. It all begins with the preconstruction effort. As Ted Rusch, vice president of preconstruction explains, “It helps to understand the various options that exist and help guide our clients towards the decision that makes sense for them. Estimating is one part of preconstruction, but so is design assistance, constructability reviews, and utilizing technology to assist owners in their decision-making process.”

As healthcare systems reach physical capacity and traditional expansion becomes less of an option, the focus will shift from adding space to maximizing flexibility within existing spaces. One emerging approach is the standardization of patient rooms into “universal rooms.” As Jeff Fleming, project executive, explains, “Patient rooms will probably be designed with the same size and layout. If a typical patient room needs to be converted into an intensive care unit, additional electrical or medical gas components can be integrated to support that level of care.”

In this model, rooms are designed with adaptability in mind. Rather than serving a single, fixed purpose, they function more like a “Swiss Army knife,” capable of supporting multiple levels of care depending on the facility’s needs. One day a room could be an intensive care unit, the next it could be a recovery room. This flexibility allows healthcare systems to respond more effectively to shifting patient volumes, emergent conditions, and long-term demand without requiring major structural expansion.

One emerging area that requires dedicated facilities is behavioral health care. As David Glasscock, vice president and business unit leader, notes, “Those in need of mental health services have just shown up at the emergency department, which not only



is a strain on that department because it’s not necessarily built for that service, but it also takes away from other people who truly have a physical emergency.” Emergency departments are increasingly serving as default access points for behavioral health, despite lacking the environments and resources needed for effective treatment.

As a result, there is a rising need to prioritize purpose-built behavioral health and long-term care facilities. These environments will provide the appropriate level of safety, privacy, and continuity of care by delivering more effective treatment outcomes while alleviating pressure on traditional healthcare facilities.

The role of central energy plants will also become critical to operations. Additional power will be required to support the continued emergence of robotics in the healthcare facility. Facilities today are already using robotics for linen and food delivery. The role of robotics will continue to expand. Advances in precision and automation will enable robots to play a more direct role in patient care by supporting procedures, enhancing safety, and improving consistency in outcomes.

Batson-Cook supports these ever-evolving trends through a preconstruction process tailored to each client’s needs. As Ted Rusch, vice president of preconstruction for healthcare, explains, “I think the biggest benefit that we’re providing our clients is ongoing conceptual and schematic pricing on new and emerging acuity cases and providing budgetary help for new levels of service. The things that make behavioral health unique also have a cost component to it. And understanding that and setting appropriate budgets that are reliable and predictable is important in getting these projects off the ground.”



The pace of healthcare design and construction has accelerated drastically to meet the surging needs of facilities while keeping pace with rapidly evolving care technologies. In response, the Batson-Cook team has become more agile than ever, collaborating earlier with trade partners, securing long-lead equipment earlier in the process, and getting creative with procurement.

Artificial intelligence will also play a central role in the next generation of healthcare, though the human element will remain essential to care delivery. As AI becomes more deeply integrated into workflows and transforms healthcare into smartcare, it will enable faster decision-making, more precise diagnostics, and improved efficiency through real-time data insights.

However, this integration will not involve dedicated data centers within healthcare facilities. Instead, hospitals and MOBs will need to upgrade their internal infrastructure by requiring greater power capacity, advanced IT systems, and more robust networks to support AI-enabled technologies.

As healthcare facilities explore the benefits of integrating AI into their smartcare, Batson-Cook has similarly integrated AI into the healthcare construction process. With the deployment of multiple AI tools throughout the company, our team can perform constructability reviews in days, not weeks, identifying potential challenges earlier than before and offering solutions before they impact a schedule or a budget.

Batson-Cook is a true partner to its clients, guided by the belief that their success is our success. We work closely with owners and design teams, leveraging our institutional knowledge to help clients make informed decisions at a pace faster than before. With countless variables in complex healthcare projects, and the ever-evolving needs of facilities and healthcare technologies, we help clients navigate critical decisions that enhance patient care while maintaining operational efficiency. Batson-Cook remains involved throughout the project, ensuring collaboration, accountability, and expertise.



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