

Raising the Bar When It Comes to Lowering Stress In the Hospital

How Dr. John Drawbert, CEO and founding partner of Oakleaf Surgical Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin discovered a unique solution to reduce stress levels in patients and families who visit the hospital.



In 2001, a group of independent physicians in Eau Claire, Wisconsin established the OakLeaf Surgical Hospital, a private hospital designed exclusively for surgery. The goal was to create a patient-centric surgical hospital that set itself apart in an era where large hospital companies and brands were taking over private practices and regional hospitals, with diminishing patient care, focus and comfort accompanying the transition.

OakLeaf's goal was to create an environment that was less stressful and more relaxing for patients. With this in mind, Dr. John Drawbert, one of OakLeaf's founders and CEO of the hospital, looked for unique ways to reinforce a stress-free and relaxing environment for patients and families. Dr. Drawbert heard about the atmosphere-Healthcare relaxation display systems designed for hospital and healthcare facilities. After internal research and testing, the hospital installed the atmosphere-Healthcare displays in various places throughout the hospital, and the staff immediately began noticing a change in patient's and family stress levels while at the hospital.

This is an interview with Dr Drawbert about his experience with the atmosphere-Healthcare displays at the OakLeaf Surgical Center.

atmosphere-Healthcare: What were the primary reasons you chose the Atmosphere Health Care display for the OakLeaf Surgical Center?

Dr. Drawbert: I was in the local Apple store and the owner said they had this new healthcare display system that might be useful in our new hospital. So I took a look at it and I was really impressed by the vividness of the video content. The nature scenes were incredible!

atmosphere-Healthcare: Can you describe the experience seeing it the first time?

Dr. Drawbert: Watching the beautiful nature scenes with the ambient noise immediately relaxed me.

atmosphere-Healthcare: What caused that sense of relaxation?



Dr. John Drawbert with atmosphere-Healthcare display



Dr Drawbert: I learned that atmosphere-Healthcare uses a special technique of slowing down the speed of the film, and that slow movement technique relaxes you. And, in my experience, it did just that. So I began thinking about how that would work for us in a waiting room for surgical families, to address stress.

atmosphere-Healthcare: Where did you see the primary use for the atmosphere-Healthcare displays in the hospital?

Dr. Drawbert: I initially envisioned it as something we could use for the families waiting for their loved ones



who are in surgery. We've tried some of these types of systems at OakLeaf in the past. Traditionally, at our hospital and other hospitals alike, the families are usually in these larger rooms. And they always have TVs on. And like I said, we tried a few systems in waiting rooms in the past. And they had these kind of static boring, blah, nature scenes. People just asked us to turn them off.

atmosphere-Healthcare: So the experience with the atmosphere-Healthcare screens and content was noticeably different from the other systems you had tried?

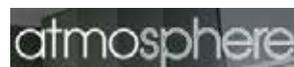
Dr. Drawbert: Yes. This was a big improvement on what we had seen and subscribed to before. So I showed the rest of the executive team. They came out to the Apple store to take a look at it and they all agreed we should try the display system out. Now, two of the displays in the main waiting room for the families are hooked up to the atmosphere-Healthcare system. And then we have a third display that's down in the eating area that's hooked up to regular TV. So if people want the regular TV they go down to the eating area. And if people want to just sit quietly waiting for their families to come out, they can sit, read a book, read a magazine while the atmosphere-Healthcare displays are on.

atmosphere-Healthcare: So it sounds like from your experience, the feeling was that the experience went beyond just having something that was sort of an entertainment or something to use to pass time. But the displays and the content were really there more as a sort of therapeutic support.

Dr. Drawbert: Right. What happens when you sit and look at the content, at least it was this way when I viewed it, the time seems to pass quickly because you're so captured by the beautiful detail and the vividness of the video production that you kind of get caught up in it. And frankly in my case it felt like my pulse slowed down and my blood pressure dropped. And then I just became slightly mesmerized by it. I've seen that too when I go out to talk to families if they're sitting in front of it. They're just kind of mesmerized and the time goes fairly quickly for them. And the impression I've gotten, and the feedback I've gotten is that they really have enjoyed this experience more than they have at other hospitals. Like I say, we had a video display experience setup before. It was very drab and not particularly captivating like the atmosphere-Healthcare system is.



atmosphere-Healthcare: Sounds like what you had before was one of those healthcare-targeted digital signage systems that also run promotional material and regular TV shows?



Dr. Drawbert: Yes, I can't remember the name of the one we had, but it was one of the most popular systems. But the content wasn't produced or displayed anywhere near the same level as the atmosphere-Healthcare system in terms of the vividness, the color, the quality of the scenes. They'd show a still image of meadow or forest, stuff like that. No movement at all, and certainly not the experience of the slow movement video style of the atmosphere-Healthcare system. The atmosphere-Healthcare system was a big step up from what we previously had.



atmosphere-Healthcare: So, just showing nature scenes — which is what a lot of the display companies do — doesn't necessarily provide the sort of relaxation and stress reduction benefits that the atmosphere-Healthcare system did?

Dr. Drawbert: Yes. Like I said, just from my own personal experience when I sat there it was very relaxing. And you just kind of felt a lot of stress just eek out of your body. As a result of that then you can kind of just sit there and chill. And then the time goes quite a bit quicker. And what you want is for families to be as relaxed and comfortable as they can while they're loved ones are having surgery. We don't want them to feel real stressed out when they're here.

atmosphere-Healthcare: So, there's a benefit both to the patient and the families of using a system like the atmosphere-Healthcare displays.

Dr. Drawbert: Right. We also have another atmosphere-Healthcare display that we have in the pre-op area for outpatient surgery. So in addition to the families watching in the main portion of the hospital, in the pre-op area, when an individual comes in for just a quick outpatient procedure, there's an atmosphere-Healthcare system experience as they're going through the insurance stuff and all that. And, we've found that the atmosphere-Healthcare screens have been helpful for people kind of being relaxed prior going into their outpatient procedure as well.



atmosphere-Healthcare: What do you notice about people's reactions that might indicate that it's actually reducing stress?

Dr. Drawbert: If I go out to talk to families and they're watching a news show such as CNN or Fox News, they begin getting caught up in all the stuff going on in the world, which doesn't make them any more relaxed for sure. With the atmosphere-Healthcare system in the room, they're kind of mesmerized. They're sitting in their chair sometimes half asleep but they're certainly more relaxed than they would be if they're watching one of the news stations, or Judge Judy, or some of the other daytime stuff that you see in a hospital waiting room.

atmosphere-Healthcare: Was the addition of the atmosphere-Healthcare displays part of a conscious decision to improve on the overall healthcare experience at the hospital?

Dr. Drawbert: Yes. We wanted to do anything we could to make both the families and the patients more relaxed, more comfortable. When that happens, time tends to feel like it goes a little quicker. Certainly for a surgical family that's waiting, one of the best things you can do is have the time pass as painlessly and quickly as possible so that they're not so worried. And we found that like I say, when somebody gets kind of mesmerized, or relaxed, or just kind of looking at the screen drifting off, that time seems to pass by very quickly.

atmosphere-Healthcare: Talk a little more about the locations where the displays are at the hospital, and the environment you want to create.



Dr. Drawbert: We have not so far programmed the atmosphere-Healthcare systems into the patient rooms, but that is part of our planned Phase 2 rollout of the technology. Right now we have two TVs in the large surgical waiting room, which again is for the families waiting while their loved ones are back in surgery. And it's in a real nice comfortable area where there's couches, and chairs. There's a fireplace, there's magazines to read, multiple little individual sitting areas so you're not clumped all together with people you don't know. But you're going to have kind of your own little space. So that's one environment. The other environ-

ment is on the other side of the hospital where it's in the waiting room for patients who are going back for their outpatient surgery.

atmosphere-Healthcare: What types of processes happen while the patients are in those environments?

Dr. Drawbert: There might be an hour, or an hour and a half that they have to wait while someone else is having surgery done. But these people have gone through all the paperwork so they're just sitting there. We put the display system in that environment and we found that it's really helped in terms of relieving stress and relaxing prior to them going in for a surgery.

atmosphere-Healthcare: How can you tell it's relieving the stress of waiting?

Dr. Drawbert: They're not looking at their clock. They're not watching their phone to see how much time they're waiting. It's so captivating with the vividness. That's what everyone says, that's kind of what I feel too. The vividness is so unlike anything else you see that it's just really something you want to just behold and enjoy.

atmosphere-Healthcare: Do you have an experience you can share from another hospital to help explain the stress reduction benefits of the atmosphere-Healthcare displays?

Dr. Drawbert: Two days ago I had to do surgery at the main hospital here in Eau Claire. And I came out to talk to a family and they had two big TV monitors in the waiting room of the big hospital. And on one of them it was literally Judge Judy or some show like that. A couple was getting divorced and they're screaming at each other. And the guy is getting ready to jump over and punch out his ex wife or whatever. But it was like the most least non-stress type environment you could want! Everyone's worked up watching this and peoples blood pressures are rising by watching this TV show. Later that day, I did a couple of surgeries at OakLeaf where we have the atmosphere-Healthcare displays, and it was just a remarkable different environment where you walked out and you see these vivid nature videos, and people seem so relaxed watching the content. And I'm sure their blood pressures were a great deal lower. So it's kind of a nice contrast.



atmosphere-Healthcare: How do you measure patient satisfaction and experience, and how are you doing with regards to overall patient success?

Dr. Drawbert: Our patient care results in terms of how the patients felt they were treated really governs a lot of what we do. Medicine is expensive. So there's no reason it shouldn't be high quality. And it should be in a comfortable environment. So our quality results in terms of the patient satisfaction scores have always been in the top one or two percent nationally because that's a big thing that motivates us. Additionally, OakLeaf is a great environment to work in. In addition to patient satisfaction high, we want employee satisfaction because employees that are happy and satisfied coming to work tend to be better providers. All of that is important.

atmosphere-Healthcare: Any final comments about the atmosphere-Healthcare systems at OakLeaf?

Dr. Drawbert: I'd really recommend the atmosphere-Healthcare displays after seeing how well they perform and help reduce stress after only a couple months here. The cost has far been outweighed by the patient satisfaction reports and results. So, it's something that's very worthwhile for any medical environment and I really like the effect it's having on our patients.

For more information, visit atmosphere-Healthcare online:

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