HEALING BY NATURE: HOUSTON METHODIST HOSPITAL ROOFTOP HEALING GARDEN

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Access to nature is not always available in most urban areas and one of the most notable areas it is absent is in the medical field. It has been proven through various studies in the health care how nature has a significant impact on the healing process and other benefits it can provide. One of the first breakthroughs on this topic occurred in Ulrich’s “A View From the Window,” study which showed how something as simple as providing views of nature can provide substantial healing benefits for patients. After researching multiple studies and theories, the main guiding principle for this design concept is based on the idea of Positive Distractions. Many of the studies and healing gardens examined included many elements that are commonly referred to as “positive distractions,” that were crucial to the success of the study or design. The design of the garden focuses on creating a series of positive distractions that people can choose to explore.

- Water feature provides calming sound
- Educational landscapes can teach users about native plants
- Outdoor cafe is a great place for lunch
- Inspiration Grove is a vibrant, social space
- Seasonal blooming areas around the garden
- Memorial Wall can remind families of loved ones

**POSITIVE DISTRACTIONS**

- Reduces amount of medication needed
- Decreases the amount of nursing calls for patients
- Reduces overall mood and pain of patients and staff
- Provides sense of hope
- Improves attitude about medical condition
- Improves staff satisfaction
- Provides healing benefits
- Encourages relaxation
- Encourages staff to stop and reflect
- Improves user’s mood and level of social activity
- Provides visual stimulation
- Adds aesthetic value
- Strengthens users’ senses
- Improves users’ mood and level of social activity
- Provides healing benefits
- Encourages relaxation

**Medical Benefits**

**Mental Benefits**

**Economic Benefits**

**Ecological Benefits**

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Coastal Prairie
The Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes consist of a series of barrier islands, tallgrass prairie remnants, salt grass marshes, and oak mottes in the slowly drained plains along the Gulf of Mexico. The land is fairly level and below 150 feet above sea level.

Post Oak Savannah
The Post Oak Savannah is a gently rolling to hilly landscape that transitions between the Great Plains and forests. The elevation ranges anywhere between 300 to 800 feet above sea level. The planting can be described as grassland with patches of oak savannah and oak woodland cutting through it.

South Texas Plains
The South Texas Plains is typically characterized by thorny shrubs and trees with patches of tropical plants scattered throughout. Often referred to as the Brush Country, this region is home to a wide variety of wildlife with many rare species found here.
Memorial Walk

This walkway is designed to be a place of peace and relaxation for both the donors and families involved with the hospital. The gateway pillars create an entry portal that signifies the beginning of a unique space within the healing garden. Visitors can enjoy the memorial mural that is composed of plaques purchased by donors. The plaques can be designed into specific shapes with different colors in order to create an aesthetically pleasing experience when viewing them. Houston Methodist can choose symbols that align with their goals and objectives, or chooses to change them over time. The plaques can be easily moved or swapped out if needed in the future.
The main entry plaza is a vibrant, social space, highlighted by a series of structural shade trees, planting beds, seating areas, and a small outdoor café area. The shade structures create a comforting sense of enclosure and intimacy, providing plenty of opportunities for displays using lights and different art pieces. It is important to provide a sense of privacy for those who seek it because the garden is exposed and highly visible with two towers surrounding it. This plaza would provide a great gathering space for patients, staff, and visitors to meet, have lunch, and host events. The bright colors on the shade structures also make the area pleasing to view from above. The shade structure colors can be swapped out throughout the year to correlate with different holidays or seasons.
Texas Landscapes

This series of distinct planting beds is designed to showcase the various types of habitats found around the greater Houston area. The three types of landscape zones are the Coastal Prairie, Post Oak Savannah, and the South Texas Plains. Each different zone would have native plantings from their respective region with educational displays to provide patients, staff, and visitors with information about where these plants come from and what ecosystems they support. This space can be meaningful for residents of Texas, as well as visitors from out of state because it can either remind them of home or where they grew up, or can teach them about the beautiful landscapes and plants found in Texas.
There are various spaces with flexible programming that are located in the outer parts of the healing garden that are designed specifically with the staff and visitors needs in mind. One area in particular is designed as a staff lounge. These spaces provide the staff with places to have lunch together and allow them to have some time alone for themselves. Hospitals have some of the highest turnover rates out of any other field. Providing staff with these spaces and amenities to help relieve stress could help greatly in retaining them and reducing the turnover rate. The lounges would have multiple types of seating areas for eating, socializing, and relaxing. The changes in material would provide visual cues to signify the edges of the garden and the staff area.