

20 years in LVT and Healthcare

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My relationship with healthcare and LVT flooring ... where do I begin? I sold my first healthcare-related LVT job back in 1999. Yes, you read that right, 1999! Back when there were only a handful of manufacturers and even fewer visual and color options. Many things have changed in

the LVT world, but one has not: healthcare end users are still using LVT, and now more than ever. People choose LVT for healthcare applications for a variety of reasons, but I personally believe two really stand out. The primary one is LVTs versatility. Over the past two decades, more hospitals and healthcare-related buildings have been

moving away from their traditional sterile/institutional looks in favor of spaces which provide an atmosphere that is more familiar and home-like. The ability to create an environment that is warm and comfortable for all—patients, caregivers, and guests—is very important, and the versatile wood, tile, and abstract looks that can be achieved by using an LVT product are now endless and help to further enhance the patient experience by providing more nurturing surroundings, which ultimately benefit the healing process. There are more choices than ever before; more patterns, colors, sizes, and installation options, so an end user can truly create a space that is aesthetically pleasing, functional, and practical for all. The other major reason is this—it lasts! When you have a good installation and the proper maintenance, an LVT floor can last well beyond its initial intended life cycle expectancy. I often like to say that it “will ugly out before it wears out,” meaning the end user will tire of the look long before

the product loses its ability to properly function in the space.

Over the past 25 years, I have been on many sides of the healthcare design experience, working for an architecture firm heavily focused on healthcare, as an A&D sales representative working directly with facilities departments, and now as a manufacturer working to design and build commercially rated floors that provide both beauty and function. While all of these jobs are very different, they all have an end goal in common: to find the best product for the application while keeping cost and maintenance in mind—again, beauty and function. When speaking with designers and end users about healthcare related projects, I always discuss two things first, WHERE and WEAR. First, WHERE is the product being proposed for use within a facility? Are you looking at major hospital corridors, secondary waiting rooms, or perhaps even more limited use in a medical office building? Knowing where the product will be used will ultimately help you determine the second decision to be made, WEAR. Knowing the level of wheel and foot traffic, as well as dynamic and static point loads in the intended space, will help determine the WEAR layer and finish that best fits the application and the budget. In general, a 20mil+ wear surface is advised for heavier healthcare applications, but in some instances for TI work in medical office buildings, a lower wear surface with a commercial rating will suffice, as it will help the overall budget while still maintaining the overall aesthetic of the job. Again, it's important to have a conversation with the end user about the budget, the wear needs, and the overall aesthetic they are looking for, as all have a role in the decision making process.

Once a decision on the product has been made, the second, and some would say, more critical phase of the project begins: installation and maintenance. No matter how durable or well-built an LVT may be, if it's not given a good foundation and proper maintenance, it will not perform at its highest level. Most manufacturers will tell you their products are only as good as what they go over and what is done to them once installed. This is most certainly the case with all LVT, regardless of manufacturer, style, wear surface, etc . . . And because all healthcare applications are such sensitive environments, it's even more important to make certain all manufacturer's suggested installation and maintenance guidelines are followed. For installation, always keep in mind that LVT products are resilient, so a well-prepared subfloor is critical to the success of the installation, especially when a glue down LVT has been selected (as the resilient flooring selected will conform the subfloor underneath—give it a wavy subfloor and you will have a wavy LVT). Adhesive selection plays a very important role as well, as many, if not all, of these applications will have a great deal of heavy rolling and point loads on them 24/7. Using an adhesive that can help support these loads is a



must, so if there is a question as to which is best for the installation, it is always advised to consult with the manufacturer's technical department. The upside on the maintenance aspect of LVT is it typically does not require an added wax treatment to help preserve its look. Now, some healthcare providers still subscribe to the full-wax "shiny equals clean" method, but it isn't necessary as it was in years past, as most LVTs in today's market have been pre-finished with a factory applied coating, many of them enhanced with anti-bacterial treatments which provide better infection control, and additional hardeners in the finish, such as ceramic beads, which provide better day-to-day scratch and scuff resistance. Both help contribute to a healthier, easier to maintain flooring option. However, let me state that although these products don't require an added finish, this in no way implies they do not need day to day routine cleaning and maintenance. Following a manufacturer's recommended guidelines for maintenance is always advised. Technical departments go to great lengths to insure they are recommending the best products, tools, and applications to keep your floor looking as good in year five as it did on day one. I have witnessed this firsthand on many occasions throughout the years. Maintenance is key to the life of the floor.

One thing is certain . . . The LVT and Healthcare industries are in a constant state of change and competition. We are all vying for attention and presence in our respective markets. With technology expanding every day in the LVT world, and various new models for delivering healthcare to the masses popping up more frequently, it's often hard to keep up with these changes, but we do our very best. The patient experience of today is very different than it was 20 years ago, even 5 years ago, and healthcare end users strive every day to improve upon this experience, so you can be sure it will keep changing in the future. The challenge for us in the LVT industry is to keep up, to continue making improvements to the performance and aesthetics of our products. Challenge accepted! ■