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Protecting walls and
brightening up spaces

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It is now widely accepted that creating a positive environment in healthcare settings has a significant impact on patients' wellbeing, potentially leading to fewer infections, therapeutic benefits, reduced pain, and shorter hospital stays.¹ Maria Morgan, Product manager for Wall Protection at Gradus, outlines how good wall protection can contribute – by reducing wear and tear, and creating a more pleasant environment for patients, staff, and visitors alike.

The need for wall protection solutions in healthcare buildings has never been greater. This is made clear by the fact that, every 24 hours, the NHS sees more than one million patients. Such high volumes of traffic naturally cause scrapes and scuffs to walls, corners, and doors – to say nothing of the constant flow of trolleys, wheelchairs, and beds. This damage costs large amounts of money in maintenance and repairs, and impacts on the appearance of the buildings' environments – which can be perceived by some as a reflection of the care being provided. To insure against this, a wide range of easy-to-clean wall protection products are available. These prevent everyday damage to walls, corners, and medical equipment, reducing long-term expenditure on maintenance, repair, and refurbishment. In addition, they play a role in the aesthetics of the interior, protecting it from blemishes, and making it more attractive through their ability to be specified in a range of colours and finishes that complement practically any design scheme.

'Zoning' into different areas

The best and most cost-effective approach when specifying wall protection for healthcare estates is to 'zone' the building into different areas, each defined by the volume and type of traffic it experiences. Some 'zones' will be bombarded by wheeled traffic made up of trolleys, medical equipment, wheelchairs, beds, and catering trollies – whereas others may host relatively light pedestrian footfall. The amount and type of traffic that each zone experiences dictates the type of wall protection system it requires. Only with careful planning based on a range of factors will you be able to get the right solution for your requirements.

Keeping corridors free from unsightly damage

Corridors and circulation areas are typically the busiest areas of any healthcare facility. To keep the walls looking good for longer – and reduce the need for frequent repairs and repainting – it is wise to consider installing a range of

wall protection solutions that work together. This is recommended for all corridors, but especially for higher-traffic areas. A key requirement for corridors is wall cladding. When installed to half the height of the wall, wall cladding will resist most direct impact damage, as well as the many scuffs and scrapes caused by the constant flow of traffic. A solution that is through-coloured will conceal the effects of impact and abrasion, by ensuring that any surface damage appears as the same colour as the rest of the cladding. Equally essential to a comprehensive wall protection system are wall guards. These should be installed in the areas of the wall that receive the most contact, where they will provide robust protection through a combination of vinyl covers, aluminium retainers, and internal bumpers designed to absorb and dissipate impact.

Wall protection systems also play an important role in helping visitors and staff navigate their way around the building. It is good practice to use colour within each zone to provide people with a visual cue about where they are and where they should go. It's also recommended to ensure that you install wall guards with vinyl covers and other components that can be easily replaced, as this makes future maintenance easier.

Vulnerable corners

The most vulnerable areas of any building, though, are the corners. When left exposed, corners in healthcare facilities can be easily damaged by everyday wheeled or pedestrian traffic, again leading to unsightly damage and higher maintenance bills. To combat this, consider high-impact corner guards that feature aluminium retainers to provide a reinforced defence against high-impact damage, combined with shock-absorbent vinyl covers that can be easily replaced if damaged. While most corner damage occurs at lower heights, it is worth considering full-height corner guards, since some trolleys and carts reach up to two metres in height.



Gradus Bed Head Protectors have angled profiles – to protect beds and other moveable objects against wall impact.

To blend in – or to contrast?

Most wall protection products can either be specified in colours and tones that contrast with the surrounding wall surfaces, or that blend in with them. The advantage of wall protection that blends in is that this will not compromise the particular style that you are seeking to establish. For example, if the aim is to create a deliberately non-clinical environment, the best option may be ‘invisible’ protection that performs its job unnoticed. Alternatively, contrasting wall protection can, in some cases, prevent damage. This is due to the fact that it helps to warn people of potential hazards or projections, such as lamppost covers.

One type of wall protection that should definitely stand out, however, is handrails. Designed to provide pedestrians with guidance and support, while also offering a degree of surface protection from wheeled traffic, handrails and combination rails should have a light reflective value (LRV) of at least 30 points’ difference to the surface that surrounds them, as this ensures ease of recognition.

Other requirements for handrails include that they should be easy and comfortable to grip, slip-resistant, and not cold to the touch. This is in line with Approved Document M – Volume 2, and BS 8300-2:2018.

Protecting vital medical equipment

Wall protection not only protects the fabric of the building – it also helps to prevent damage to vital medical equipment. The act of pushing the bed against the wall can cause damage to such equipment, while the raising, lowering, and tilting of the bed can clash with overhead trunking. To address this, correctly projected protection will help to keep the bedhead away from the trunking, and indeed anything plugged into it. At Gradus, we have designed special Bed Head Protectors to provide maximum protection against such damage. Their angled profiles, when attached to the walls, make them ideal for



SureProtect Design is also available with a bespoke print option, which can be used to portray any design the customer wishes, such as a relaxing landscape in a theatre.

keeping beds and other moveable objects away from wall impact. Extender options are available for increased protection.

Impervious surfaces ‘for ultimate hygiene’

In certain areas of any healthcare building, of course, the main priority is hygiene. As well as being able to withstand impact from medical equipment that is moved around, wall protection in clinical environments must be impervious to bacteria and moisture, in line with HBN 00-10. For such areas, it is essential that the surface is smooth and easy to clean, as well as able to cope with the heavy-duty cleaning chemicals frequently used in such areas. Consider a solution that can also be thermoformed on site to produce bespoke profiles, such as corner guards or ‘U’-shapes, if required.

Similarly, bathrooms in healthcare facilities require effective wall protection – particularly in the case of rooms that include hoists or wheelchairs to help patients with disabilities. Here, robust

cladding that can withstand not just impact, but intensive chemical cleaning, is again the best option. As with clinical environments, the solution should be smooth and easy to clean, presenting a tougher alternative to ceramic tiles, and removing the need for grout, which can harbour bacteria.

Waiting rooms and family rooms

Finally, the main consideration when specifying wall protection for waiting rooms and family rooms should be the sensory experience of the user. For these rooms, it is key that – as well as providing an effective barrier to scuffs and scrapes – cladding creates a welcoming and relaxing atmosphere, ideally with no trace of a clinical feel. To meet this requirement, Gradus SureProtect Design is available in a range of contemporary finishes that help to create a modern, aesthetically pleasing interior – from warm wood-effects to modern, metallic styles. SureProtect Design is also available with a bespoke print option, which can be used



A corridor incorporating both corner and wall guards.



Sheet wall protection can be cut into bespoke designs.



Gradus wall protection in a birthing room.

to portray any design the customer wishes, such as the relaxing landscapes that have been shown to soothe and comfort patients, thus aiding their recovery. Another creative option is a textured sheet solution that can be cut into bespoke designs, combining functionality with aesthetics, and in this way offering endless design possibilities.

A full, integrated service

At Gradus, we have been involved with contract interior solutions for more than 50 years, and have a wealth of experience in using wall protection to enhance and protect healthcare facilities. The largest UK wall protection manufacturer, we offer

one of the most comprehensive ranges available, providing your building with first-class protection, while helping to enhance its visual environment.

When it comes to care homes and other facilities for the elderly and those with dementia, our service benefits from a profound understanding of the importance of inclusive design, ensuring that each building can be easily accessed and used by as many people as possible, regardless of age or disability. This capability is underlined by the fact that we have worked closely with the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling. The Centre has completed an assessment of the full Gradus range of wall protection products, carpets, matting, stair edgings, skirtings, and floor trims, for use within dementia-inclusive environments.

Whatever your type of healthcare facility, we will ensure that your healthcare building gets the wall protection it needs. Our team of expert advisors can provide you with a free building survey service, which will see them use their product expertise to identify the most vulnerable areas within the building, and recommend protection where it is required.

Alternatively, for total peace of mind, our full supply and installation service can support you from initial enquiry and specification, through site survey and manufacture in our Cheshire factories, and all the way to installation at your healthcare facility.

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References

- 1 Yamaguchi Y. Better Healing from Better Hospital Design. *Harvard Business Review* online, 5 October 2015 [https://tinyurl.com/nv3sjna].



Maria Morgan

Maria Morgan is the Product Marketing manager for Wall Protection at Gradus, the UK's largest manufacturer of wall protection solutions. She has recently worked closely with the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling, overseeing its assessment of Gradus's full range of products for their suitability in dementia-inclusive environments. She has worked in the construction industry for over 25 years.

- 2 NHS Statistics, facts and figures. NHS Confederation, 14 July, online [https://tinyurl.com/y56lssdk].
- 3 Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing. The Short Report, 2017. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing [https://tinyurl.com/y45o5hdh].

We can help you save money

At Gradus we believe that protecting budgets is as important as protecting walls that's why we offer our unique **FREE Building Survey Service**. Our specialist Wall Protection Team will use their product expertise to identify the most vulnerable areas within your building and recommend the best and most cost-effective solution.

Book a survey of your building

Start saving money now, contact a member of our specialist Wall Protection team on **01625 428922** or contact us on www.gradus.com/contact-us



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