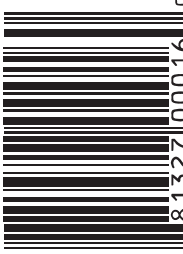


# segd DESIGN



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Honor Award: Bookending  
the Hospital Experience

Lankenau Hospital, like its visitors, now knows exactly where it's going.

by Marisa Bartolucci

Whether patient or visitor, no one likes going to the hospital. The cold institutional surroundings can be a little scary. And it's easy to get lost when negotiating those unfamiliar, non-descript corridors. At Lankenau Hospital in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, visitors were getting lost all the time. Staff complained about how often they had to give directions. This was a hospital with a serious wayfinding problem.

To remedy the situation, John Barickman, the hospital's Vice-President for Operations, interviewed several environmental graphics firms and then selected AGS, a local company in nearby Exton, Pennsylvania, to come up with a new signage program. He liked that the firm had worked within the state's Main Line hospital system before, and was impressed by the unusual level of thought that it invested in its projects.

Alan Jacobson, President of AGS and Principal of ex;it, wanted to ratchet up that level even higher at Lankenau, by conducting an extensive survey to determine the wayfinding challenges facing visitors, a diverse group that include the elderly and non-English speaking. He also wanted to develop a masterplan of the facility, extending beyond the hospital's internal circulation. As he sees it, the quality of a visitor's hospital experience begins with the scheduling of a procedure and doesn't end until after the procedure is completed and the visitor has left the hospital parking lot. At AGS, these before-and-after moments are called "bookend" experiences.

"It was a whole other way of thinking about signage," says Barickman. It was also a much more ambitious wayfinding program than the hospital had originally budgeted. Nevertheless, Barickman agreed to a comprehensive visitor survey to see just how bad the problem was. More than 40 visitors were questioned about whether they had gotten lost and where, whether they had looked at the hospital website, and what their ultimate hospital experience had been. AGS also surveyed some 40 members of the staff.

Through the survey, the design firm's subsidiary ex;it (which specializes in evaluating how people perceive space) developed a tool for measuring and analyzing environmental conditions, called the I'm Lost Factor%. By quantifiably and qualitatively assessing these conditions, the tool enables AGS to determine how much conditions improved after a wayfinding system was implemented.

The original survey revealed that, among even repeat visitors, only 15 percent felt completely confident about where they were going within the hospital. Staffers were, on average, giving directions to 3.4 people per day. Jacobson estimated that, as a result of poor signage, some \$750,000 a year of staff time was being wasted on direction giving, and the uncertainty of visitors over where they were going was only compounding their anxiety levels. "Human-to-human contact is an important part of the healthcare experience," notes Jacobson, "but it is best achieved when directions are a con-



Above: Signage directs visitors to correct parking garage based on zones, preventing confusion in the hospital.

Opposite: The visitor arrives at their destination. Projection, wall, and ceiling-mounted signs mark the entrance to Admissions.

firmation, not a requirement, for finding your way. Then giving directions enhances the visitor's confidence."

There were other discoveries, too. It turned out the elderly were parking in the most distant lots because of the reduced rates, and so were walking longer distances to the hospital entrance and then through the whole hospital to get to their destination. Often, visitors got lost because they didn't realize that not all the elevators accessed all the floors. They also got confused about the name of their destination—were they supposed to go to the cardiology department or the cardiac lab? Such uncertainty often resulted in their being directed to the wrong place.

"Once they realized their signage problems encompassed the whole campus, and were costing them a lot of money, the staff were all ears," says Jacobson. The hospital commissioned his masterplan, which would be rolled out over the course of the next three years. A leadership committee of 125 people from the hospital's many departments—from marketing to nursing—was assembled to help advise AGS and ensure the whole hospital complied with and accepted the program once installed.

The wayfinding scheme Jacobson devised stemmed from one simple, but crucial decision to divide the Lankenau campus into two primary zones: admissions and outpatient services. All the parking areas were connected to these zone designations, so that visitors would know exactly where to park and enter. (Parking fees were also reduced.) At the elevator banks in the parking lots, signs were installed to indicate the lot's zone and level and to dispense small cards printed with

#### LANKENAU HOSPITAL WAYFINDING SYSTEM

**Location**  
Wynnewood, PA

**Client**  
Main Line Health—  
Lankenau Hospital

**Design**  
AGS and ex;it

**Design Team**  
Alan Jacobson (Principal in  
Charge), Jennifer Long,  
Ryan Aungst, Ellen Taylor

**Fabrication**  
AGS

**Consultant**  
Bob Toth

**Photos**  
Jeffrey Totaro



that information. If visitors forget where they park, they simply have to check the card in their pockets. Once past the lobby, they are directed down the hallways to their destination by suspended signs, like those above airport highways. If they need to take an elevator, they will find the banks clearly marked to specify which floors the elevators access. In areas where visitors typically get lost, there are now “You Are Here” wayfinding maps. And since the signage system AGS developed is based on numbers and letters, and color-coded, visitors don’t even have to know English to find their way.

Today, when a patient schedules a procedure at Lankenau, the hospital sends out a destination guide with a map, providing specific directions to get to that destination and its closest waiting room. AGS also schooled the staff and volunteers on how to provide directions in a way that will enhance the visitor’s confidence at each contact point.

After three quarters of the wayfinding program had been rolled out, AGS conducted the same visitor survey again. This time, 67 percent of visitors expressed overall confidence as to where they were going, while less than a third required directions from the staff. According to Jacobson’s calculations, this resulted in savings for the hospital of some \$350,000 in staff productivity. When the project is fully completed, the survey will be conducted yet again.

“The hospital has come to understand that signage is something that needs to be constantly updated and reconsidered,” says Jacobson. “They also understand that while we may design signage, what AGS is really doing is providing patient support. The I’m Lost Factor%o tool makes that tangible.” ☒



Top Left: The Destination Guide and Card provide the visitor with direction to where they need to be. This visitor is headed for Admissions in A1.

Left: The hospital has two color-coded zones (A and B), one for in-patients and one for out-patients.

Opposite: Parking cards are available to help visitors find their way back to their cars.



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