GO WITH THE (TRAFFIC) FLOW

Our fourth Design Challenge entrants found their workflow disrupted when customer traffic suddenly changed directions!

by Wayne Caverly

THE OLD ADAGE IN DESIGN IS "form follows function." This is no less true in the design of pharmacies, but what happens when functions change? In many cases it means the form, the pharmacy's layout, must also change—sometimes at great cost—or efficiency will suffer.

The operations manager at a Brampton, Ontario independent pharmacy wrote to us with a workflow problem caused by changing traffic patterns. Efficiency was suffering, but management was concerned that correcting the issues would be very expensive.

I stopped by the pharmacy in October to see how we could help. After seeing the pharmacy in person, and watching both patient and staff movements, I shared both good and bad news with the managers. The bad news: that there are more problems with the design than they thought. The good news? All their problems could be fixed quite quickly and inexpensively.

When the pharmacy (located in a strip mall) had first opened, their patients would arrive through a door from an exterior parking lot that was also shared with a medical clinic next door. The pharmacy was therefore set up properly for this entrance—reception was located in a direct line with the entrance, and prescription fulfillment flowed to the opposite end of the pharmacy, where cash and counsel were located. Form followed function beautifully.

MANAGING TRAFFIC FROM TWO ENTRANCES

A year or so ago, the clinic moved to the inside of the strip mall, and a new door from the clinic to the pharmacy was opened directly beside the cash and counsel areas. The original entrance (from parking) was maintained, with the result that very shortly, 50% of patients were entering by each door. We have covered this concern in earlier articles: How do you design your pharmacy's flow when two entrance doors, situated on either end of the space, are used equally?

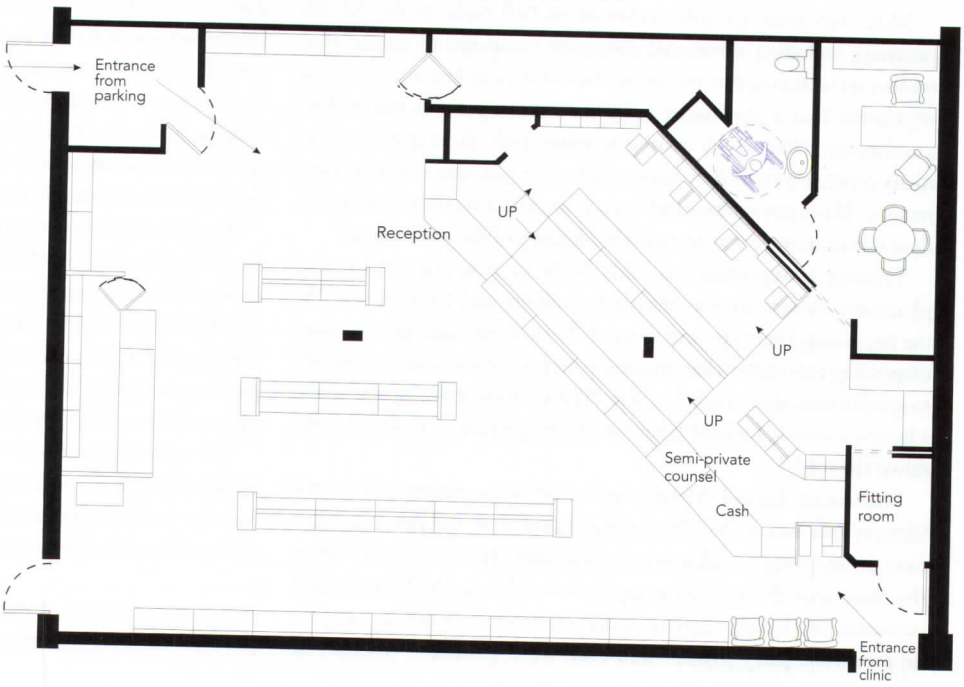
What you must do is ensure the flow from both entrances will result in a natural movement to the reception counter. In this location there was, thankfully, a second door off the parking lot that had been closed. By reopening this second door —which would be used as a main entrance—and turning the current outdoor entrance into "out only," we flow patients into the pharmacy on a similar sightline to those entering from the clinic.

As you can see (Figure 1) this leads both entrances naturally to… the cash! So next, we flip the service areas of the dispensary, making the old cash the reception, and the old reception the cash. No change to the millwork is necessary because both can be used equally well for either function. Data entry needs to move and can be accommodated quite nicely in the old semi-private counsel area (with a new privacy screen added to the front).

Next, what to do with counselling?

Beside the current reception, now re-tasked as cash, there are two storage areas. The first, which already opens to the dispensary, will have a small wall removed and become the new semi-private counselling area. The second, larger area, will have its solid door replaced with a smoked glass door, a new opening from the dis-

FIGURE 1: CURRENT LAYOUT AND ENTRANCES



pensary will be put in, and a wall added to divide the space into two rooms: one for private counsel and one for storage.

What else was wrong in Brampton? Patients didn't use the chairs provided near the cash but instead "hung around" in front of the reception counter. Visiting the store made the reasons clear: As you'll see by the photo, the waiting area was cramped and directly in the flow of traffic from the clinic. By flipping reception and cash, our new waiting area moves to the top right of the drawing, an area that is open and inviting.

The final adjustment is to the front shop shelving which was originally installed parallel to the walls. The issue with this layout is the lack of visibility from any staff member, and the resulting shrinkage problems. We recommended the islands be moved perpendicular to the dispensary, allowing full visibility of all front shop products.

A minor concern with the change in front shop gondola location is patients may head towards the dispensary before they get to the reception counter. A minor issue because no matter which aisle they use, when they arrive at the dispensary their natural inclination (as with all North Americans) will be to turn right, and turning right will lead them directly to the reception.

Form follows function, and all is right in this pharmacy once again.

Submit your drawings, layouts or photos to wayne@caverly.ca. ☐

FIGURE 3: CURRENT RECEPTION WITH TWO STORAGE AREAS

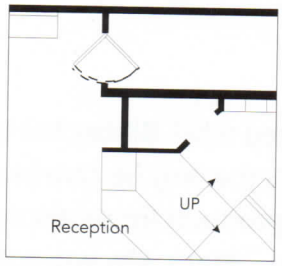


FIGURE 2: STORAGE AREAS BECOME COUNSELING

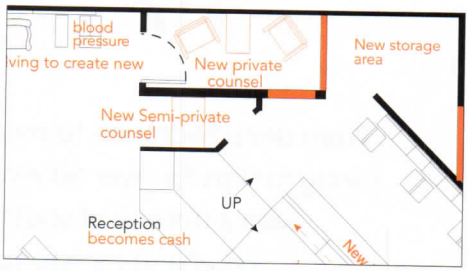


FIGURE 4: CURRENT FRONT SHOP GONDOLA ARRANGEMENT

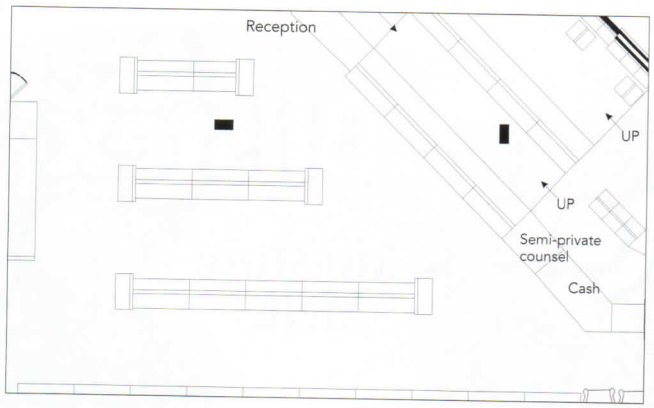


FIGURE 5: PROPOSED GONDOLA ARRANGEMENT

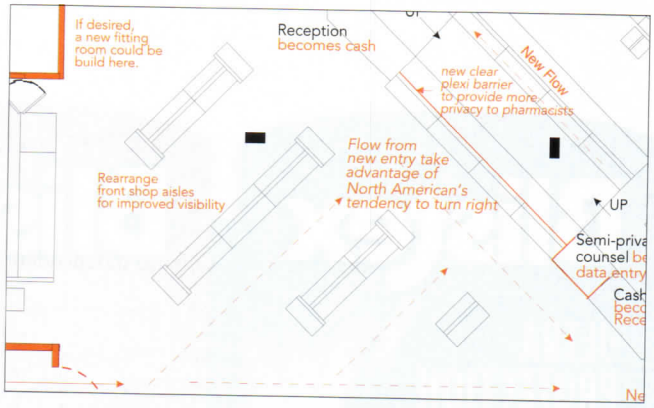
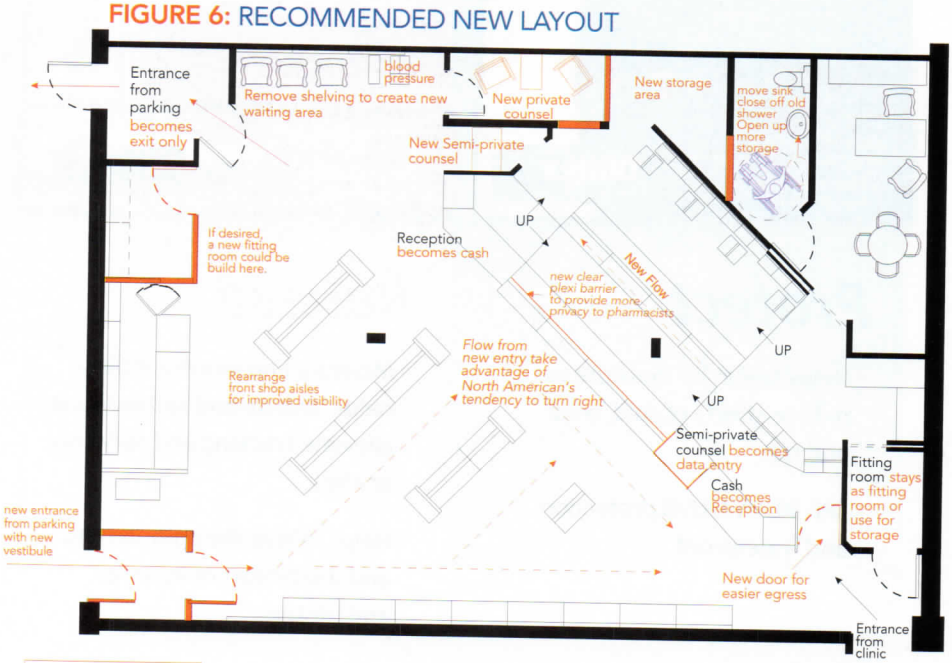


FIGURE 6: RECOMMENDED NEW LAYOUT



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