Transcript - Podcast 'Should architects wear doctors coats? - s01e01

HI, My name is Elke Miedema, PhD at department of Architecture and Civil Engineering at Chalmers technical university.
and you are listening to radio science.

Should architects wear doctors coats?

Hi, welcome to this (pilot) episode about healthcare architecture. I am Elke Miedema, and I would like to change the way you look at design. And weather architects should wear doctor's coats.

- So most people know what architects do; we **design homes**.
- But more like your **workspace**, and your **school**. Actually, most buildings around you are probably designed by an **architect**.
- Me? In my work i focus on designing **healthcare** buildings, like hospitals, psychiatric facilities and primary care centers.
- And I want to know how I could make people **feel better as an architect.**
- Because buildings and cities influence our health every day. they can make us sick, feel stressed, but can also make us feel healthy and happy.

How did I get that interest?

- Some 10 years ago, during a lunch break, I read something about a pink prison. As part of a study someone pained an entire Texas prison pink. The idea at the time was that pink lowers the heartrate of the prisoners, and therefore probably also reduce the aggression in the prison. All walls, sheets and clothing were painted pink and within two weeks the aggression dropped within the prison! … Since then I asked myself, 'if paining the prison pink has such an positive effect, in what way could other parts of building design influence the building users positively?' And especially sick people.
- I found out that Florence Nightingale, who is mostly known as the first professional nurses, also emphasized the importance of the architecture for healing. She released patients from their chains, moved them from the compact, moist and dark basements into larger rooms, with more light and fresh air.
- And I found out that architects, just before the medical revolution, were wearing doctors' coats! Because they were so convinced that their profession could heal patients!
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- My interest became more concrete when one of my colleagues pointed me to one study by Roger Ulrich from '84. Ulrich was the first to systematically study the effect of design on health. In a hospital Ulrich studied two patient groups recovering from an operation, half of them were placed in a room with a view on a brick wall, the other half had a view on nature. Can you imagine the differences? The people who could see nature needed less pain medication and healed quicker. Most new hospital now have nature in and around their buildings. Not only to reduce suffering, but also because it saved the hospital money if a patient heals quicker.
- That study opened many doors for many others to follow. Now we know that patients heal quicker when they have their own room, with a view on nature, and a place for

family to stay over. It is best if there is good noise insulation, daylight and close by nurse stations. And we are not nearly finished fining out more.

For my own research, I studied a hospital that opened in 2015. I studied how the planners, healthcare-ers and architects thought they could raise the health of the patient AND the whole community. They all agreed that, to make that happen they needed to work together, and with local community.

They came up with some ideas.

- They thought the hospital should have kitchens. These kitchens could be used by families to learn how to cook healthier.
- The thought the hospital should have one big reception, for both primary care and specialist care. Because some people waited too long to go to a doctor, because they simply didn't know where to go. With one reception area, and two organizations in one building, everyone would come to the right place.
- They thought people should be motivate to take the stairs, so those were designed centrally in the building with nice views. But also, elevators close by.
- They also thought the hospital should be visible for all people entering and leaving that part of town, to be accessible for people. And to help people to think about their health in their everyday life.

- By having the community as part of design conversations, they were able to understand their needs much better. But also this helped the community members to learn more about their health. And it helped them to be more connected to their neighbors.

Should architects wear doctors coats? Maybe, maybe not. But I will continue to find ways in which I as an architect can contribute to healthier lives for all.