

Designing the Podiatry Space for Continuous Evolution



Traditionally, podiatry procedure rooms were designed as static spaces, with a physician, patient and perhaps a medical assistant interacting in a room configured around a single, in-person visit. Today, the definition, importance and function of this space is expanding well beyond that archetype.

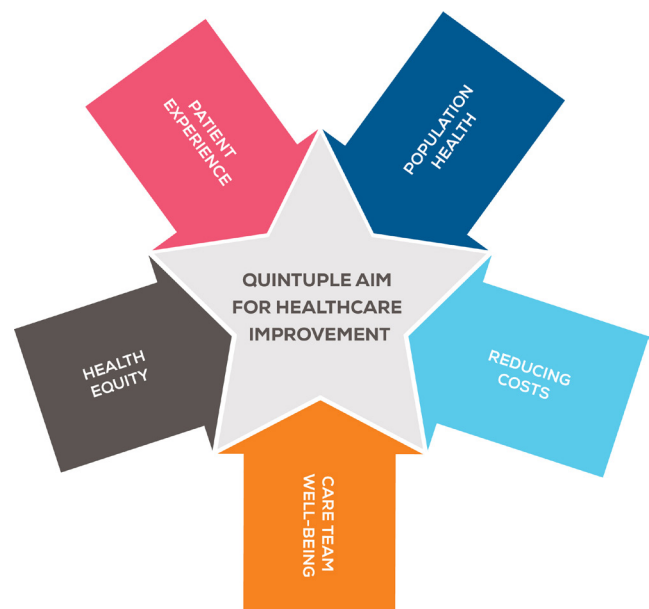
Care delivery in the podiatry space is undergoing significant change, demonstrated by the **steady increase in the number of foot and ankle surgical procedures** moving from hospital to outpatient settings. To keep pace with changes occurring in the podiatry space, the point of care (POC) ecosystem needs to continuously evolve.

This Midmark white paper looks at the role design plays in transforming the podiatry POC into a dynamic, patient-focused, tech-enabled environment that continues to evolve. It also offers five areas where practices and healthcare systems can help support this evolution.

Accelerating pace of change in ambulatory care

Traditionally, the healthcare sector, including the podiatry space, has evolved at a measured, cautious pace, with change often occurring gradually and deliberately. The following are four examples of this.

- Despite **evidence-based design** (EBD) emerging as a discipline in the 1980s, it was mostly viewed as an unconventional approach to healthcare facility design up until a few years ago. As greater attention and focus are being placed on the interaction between patients and caregivers at the ambulatory POC space, we are now seeing EBD being more frequently used in clinics and procedure rooms.
- While digital record-keeping was possible in the 1960s, widespread adoption of electronic medical records (EMR) in the US did not really begin until the **2009 HITECH Act**. Even with the financial incentives offered to hospitals and providers, it still took a few years before EMRs became truly widespread.
- Accessible design was first recognized by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in 1961. In 2021, the **Quintuple Aim** was established to include both improved patient experience and achieving health equity. There is now a growing focus on designing for accessibility when it specifically comes to exam and procedure rooms, where most of the patient/caregiver interaction occurs.
- While minimally invasive surgery has existed since the 1960s, it wasn't until more recently, with the adoption of specialized tools and imaging (like 3D gait analysis and high-resolution ultrasound), that **it has become the standard of care for many procedures**.



This does not mean the healthcare sector is resistant to change; rather it is deliberate. Healthcare directly impacts human lives. Errors in diagnosis, treatment or care can have serious consequences. Unlike in many industries where failure can mean financial loss or inconvenience, failure in healthcare can also mean loss of life. Healthcare systems, hospitals and healthcare providers are deliberate in adopting new technologies, prioritizing patient safety and risk reduction.

Healthcare is also one of the most heavily regulated industries. Any new treatment, technology or process must pass through multiple layers of approval, such as clinical trials, certification, clinical validation and oversight to ensure safety and efficacy. While these layers of approval are needed and effective to maintain quality of care, they can slow down the pace of change.



Despite this, the POC environment has seen significant change over the last five to six years brought on by technological innovation, a patient-centric approach, workforce dynamics and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. One only has to look at the current adoption of telehealth and artificial intelligence (AI) to see how the pace of change is increasing.

The COVID-19 pandemic drove rapid implementation of telehealth technology as healthcare systems tried to maintain the delivery of care. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **the number of office-based physicians using telehealth for patient visits rose from 16% in 2019 to 80.5% in 2021**. Today, telehealth continues to be a valuable part of cohesive patient care.

Meanwhile, the adoption of AI is happening just as quickly in healthcare as it is in other industries. A 2024 American Medical Association (AMA) survey found that **66% of physicians currently use AI in their practice, up from 38% in 2023**. The use of the technology at the POC is quickly reshaping care delivery by enhancing clinical decision-making and streamlining operational efficiency.

Designing a foundation for continuous evolution

This accelerated pace of change highlights how important it is that the podiatry POC is designed to evolve and remain effective as needs, patients, staff and technologies change. Flexibility, adaptability and continuous improvement are crucial.

The following are five areas where practices and healthcare systems can help establish a foundation for continuous evolution for the podiatry space.

1. Shifting patient expectations and needs

Patients are becoming consumers of care as much as they are recipients. They want more convenient, personalized and accessible care. They want the same advanced technologies they encounter in every other aspect of their lives. Most importantly, they want a healthcare environment that feels welcoming and comfortable rather than clinical. At the same time, the US population is aging, and instances of mobility challenges and obesity are increasing.

One of the most widely used tools for measuring performance of healthcare organizations, Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS), includes enhancing patient satisfaction as one of its core objectives. Scores can influence Medicare Advantage Star Ratings, payer reimbursements, provider bonuses, and patient satisfaction and retention.

Blending patient comfort and functionality in the podiatry space is a crucial part of creating a foundation for continuous evolution and clinical success. The ideal focal point for this blending is the podiatry chair, as it is the place where podiatrists truly deliver care to patients.





It can be important to have a chair, such as the **Midmark® 647 Podiatry Chair**, that offers the functionality of a clinical device with the design elements of a chair to provide comfort during lengthy procedures. Features that are a must include:

- Powered base, back and tilt to provide quick and precise patient positioning.
- Low seat height to help patients access the chair with little or no assistance.
- Conveniently placed touch controls on each side of the foot section to offer easy access while minimizing hand control damage.
- Natural chair-like position and ergonomic foot section design to help keep patients comfortable during procedures.
- Sealed foot controls and protective covers for glides that enable easier cleaning and longer lasting performance.



2. Advances in medical technology

A podiatry POC positioned to evolve needs to leverage and effectively utilize the best of new medical technologies. These technologies, such as diagnostic connectivity and AI, are changing how, when and where patients are diagnosed and managed. These innovations are enabling the podiatry space to play an increasingly central role in reducing costs, improving clinical outcomes and empowering patients to take more control of their health.

In many ways, greater connectivity and connected devices are leading the way in this transformation. Increased connectivity at the POC is making it easier to create seamless healthcare experiences. A fully connected POC ecosystem, one that transforms the space by harmonizing technology, workflow and equipment, helps healthcare systems meet the changing demands of clinical medicine. It also helps ensure they can leverage the latest technology and innovation while maintaining the critical empathy and intimacy of the provider-patient relationship.

3. Growth in outpatient care

As mentioned previously, more foot and ankle surgical procedures that were once performed exclusively in hospitals are now being done safely and effectively in podiatry offices. As technology advances and value-based care models expand, this progression is helping transform ambulatory environments, including the podiatry space, into comprehensive care hubs.

To keep up with this trend, podiatry facilities need to expand their capacity and capabilities to handle higher-acuity care, while ensuring patient safety and operational efficiency. One area where this is especially important is instrument processing, which is central to helping maintain a safe ambulatory care environment. The **instrument processing workflow and area** needs to be designed and equipped to fit current and future procedure volume.

Often considered the focal point of the instrument processing area, sterilizers are part of a frontline defense in keeping patients safe, especially as more procedures move to ambulatory care. It is important to have the size, type and number of sterilizers that fit the needs of the practice. It is also important to have a sterilizer, such as the next generation of **Midmark M9® and M11® Steam Sterilizers**, to help make instrument processing and adherence to clinical best practices (and standards) as easy and as automated as possible.



4. Workforce and operational realities

Staffing shortages and caregiver burnout are both unfortunate realities of today's healthcare sector. Working in an ambulatory care environment can be a physically and mentally demanding experience. It is not uncommon for many caregivers to routinely go home with back pain, aching necks or sore muscles and joints. This is often the result of caregivers continuously working in uncomfortable positions, utilizing poor ergonomics while accessing supplies or interacting with equipment or patients.

As clinical design has become a strategic component of the podiatry environment, it has helped healthcare organizations place more importance on staff well-being and satisfaction. There is growing understanding of the impact that the right kind of equipment, especially if it features ergonomic principles, can have on the patient and caregiver experience.



This can include cabinetry—such as [Midmark Synthesis® Cabinetry](#)—designed for average-height healthcare workers that enables people to more easily reach frequently accessed supplies without unnecessary bending, stretching or overreaching. It can also include mobile workstations—such as [Midmark® Workstations](#)—designed to help users work from an ergonomically correct position, whether seated or standing. This helps reduce unnecessary strain on a caregiver's back, shoulders or neck.



5. Important role of the equipment provider

Equipment providers can be a valuable resource for podiatrists, architects and designers during projects. A knowledgeable equipment manufacturer that has broadened its offerings beyond equipment can bring a deeper understanding of how design, equipment and layout can position the podiatry space for continuous evolution.

At Midmark, in-house design consultation experts work directly with project architects, contractors and interior designers to help ensure facility design and room configurations align with equipment and furniture needs, as well as desired workflows and accessibility goals.

During the **Midmark Live Design** process, the design team makes sure design decisions align with clinical workflow and human needs, creating clinical environments that reflect real user needs rather than purely stylistic trends. The team often solves potential issues previously undetected and offers options and critical insight to help resolve the issues. The ultimate goal of the process is to create clinical spaces that perform on multiple levels simultaneously.

Midmark also has **delivery and installation services** to help make the experience as seamless and painless as possible. **Midmark Product Repair + Service Solutions** helps ensure the medical equipment within the podiatry POC environment is functioning as intended so quality care can be provided. Led by professional clinical educators, **Midmark Clinical Education** offers flexible education options for healthcare staff, including continuing medical education courses on such topics as infection prevention and patient safety.





The podiatry POC ecosystem can no longer be static. It must continue to evolve to keep pace with shifting expectations, changing demographics, advanced technologies and new models of care. Only then can it truly be a dynamic, tech-enabled environment that balances comfort, efficiency and outcomes. Focusing on these five areas can help provide podiatry environments a strong foundation for continuous evolution.

For more information on podiatry workflows, visit the [Midmark Design Center](#).



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