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ROYAL COLLEGE of PODIATRY

Guidance on live plants in podiatry clinics

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Introducing live plants into a waiting room or reception can be a great idea for enhancing the environment, but it's important to consider several factors, especially given the specific needs of patients undergoing treatments like radiotherapy. Here's a breakdown of key considerations, along with some evidence-based insights:

Benefits of live plants

Psychological Benefits: Research indicates that the presence of plants can reduce stress, anxiety, and improve overall wellbeing. This can be particularly beneficial for patients awaiting treatment (Ulrich, R. S., 1991).

> Suggested plants
>
> **Peace Lily (Spathiphyllum spp.)** Known for its calming effects and beautiful blooms
>
> **Bamboo Palm (Chamaedorea seifrizii)** Adds a tropical feel and is known to improve air quality.

Air quality improvement

Certain plants can help improve indoor air quality by filtering pollutants, though the effectiveness can vary based on plant type and environmental conditions. NASA's Clean Air Study highlights that certain plants can filter indoor air pollutants (Wolverton, B.C., et al., 1989).

> Suggested plants
>
> **Snake Plant (Sansevieria trifasciata)** Low-maintenance and effective at filtering indoor air pollutants
>
> **Spider Plant (Chlorophytum comosum)** Excellent for removing toxins and easy to care for.

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Aesthetic appeal

Plants can make a space feel more welcoming and less clinical, potentially providing a more comfortable environment for patients and their families (Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S., 1989).

Suggested plants

ZZ Plant (Zamioculcas zamiifolia) Attractive foliage that requires minimal care

Pothos (Epipremnum aureum) Versatile and hardy, with trailing vines that can be visually appealing.

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Considerations

1) **Allergies**

   Choose low-allergen plants: Some plants can trigger allergies (e.g., pollen from flowering plants). Opt for low-pollen, non-toxic varieties like snake plants, peace lilies, or pothos.

   Low-Allergen plant suggestions:

   - **Boston Fern (Nephrolepis exaltata):** Non-flowering, lush foliage that adds greenery without allergenic pollen
   - **Rubber Plant (Ficus elastica):** Low allergy potential and effective at improving air quality
   - **Monitor reactions:** Have a system in place to monitor for any allergic reactions among patients or staff.

2) **Pests**

   Pest management: Ensure plants are free from pests before introducing them. Regular inspections and maintenance will help control any pest issues.

   Pest management suggestions:

   - **Lady Palm (Rhapis excelsa):** Resistant to pests and ideal for indoor environments
   - **Cast Iron Plant (Aspidistra elatior):** Very hardy and less prone to pest infestations.

3) **Infection control policies**

   Consult infection control guidelines: Work closely with the hospital's infection control team to ensure that introducing plants aligns with existing policies (The Joint Commission, 2015).

   - **Hygiene practices:** Establish a cleaning schedule for the plants and surrounding areas to minimise the risk of infection
   - **Plant selection:**
     - **Dracaena (Dracaena spp.):** Generally non-toxic and low maintenance, making it suitable for healthcare settings

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- **Chinese Evergreen (Aglaonema spp.):** Known for its resilience and air-purifying properties.

4) Risk assessments

Conduct a risk assessment: Evaluate potential risks related to introducing plants, including allergies, pest attraction, and maintenance requirements (ISO 31000:2018).
Training for staff: Ensure that staff handling the plants are trained in infection control practices and understand the specific needs of the plant species chosen.

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Conclusion

Introducing live plants can enhance the waiting room experience, but it's crucial to consider the potential risks and follow proper protocols. Engaging with hospital staff, particularly in infection control and facilities management, will help ensure a successful implementation. You might also want to gather feedback from patients and staff after introduction to assess the impact and make adjustments as needed.

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References

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