Are human beings supposed to work in Norwegian hospitals?

Hospitals primarily exist for the benefit of patients. However, they are also workplaces for thousands of people. These are not robots, but people with a need to enjoy their work and feel valued. Such things are also pertinent to the success of a new hospital.

Figure 1 *A brand new Norwegian hospital for somatic medicine (left) and psychiatry (right). Photo: Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association, the photo has been edited*

The other day, I visited a new Norwegian hospital which has been operational for less than a year. How many billions it cost to build it out there in no-man's land between two cities I cannot tell, but the figure is likely to be high. In practice, the hospital can only be reached by car. In an era when many people are concerned about the environment, this is a serious problem. The huge car park outside is monitored by a private and reportedly very active parking company. A delay during your errand to the hospital may very well result in a parking ticket.

Upon arrival, you are confronted by two buildings (Figure 1). One of them (the somatic section) has the appearance of an aircraft hangar with horizontal facade panels in a material that looks like brushed aluminium, whereas the other (the psychiatry section) is covered in vertical, speckled yellow facade tiles and topped by some strange-looking flat towers. In terms of their style, the two joined buildings clash completely. The general impression is one of exquisite ugliness. It sends out the signal that somatic medicine and psychiatry are two worlds that have been joined by force, but remain unrelated to each other. I assume that an architect has been enlisted through a tendering process in which price has been the only criterion.

Once inside, guidance is provided by a colour system that is totally incomprehensible, at least to those of us who are no longer as young as we were. Fortunately, help can be found at an information counter. Finally I found my way to the centre for laboratory medicine, which was my destination. There, I was deeply impressed by the level of investment in machinery and technical equipment, and the degree of functionality and automatisation. However, I was even more taken aback by the fact that it was prohibited, even in the sparse duty rooms, to hang anything other than «operationally critical» material on the walls. There was not a single picture or calendar, and hardly even a shelf for folders and books. I have scarcely ever seen a workplace that gave a more sterile impression; not only in the cleanrooms and sterile zones, but everywhere.

> «The health services are more than packaged pathways, and more than an industry»

Hospitals are there for the patients – but also for the staff

My question is this: Has it been forgotten that this is a place for people to work? Has it been forgotten that people will spend one-third of their day in this place, where they need to enjoy their work, maintain enthusiasm for their discipline and help develop it further? Has the infatuation with industrial-type models, packaged pathways, machines, robots and automatisation reached such a level as to make us forget that the health services consist of people working for the benefit of others?

I was appalled by the hospital's location, its external architecture and the ban on even the smallest attempt to give the workplace a personal touch. If such a robot culture takes root, most staff members will be content to come to work, do what's needed to obtain their salaries and then go home. Hospitals are

primarily there for the patients, but they are also workplaces for thousands of people. If this is forgotten, the quality of the services will inevitably decline. The health services are more than packaged pathways, and more than an industry.

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