



Terry Wolfe on a Guys Hospital symposium

Flooring bugbear for hospital manager

I ATTENDED a very interesting meeting at Guys Hospital in London in October. Entitled a 'flooring symposium', it was set up by **Lorna Wain**, design adviser for Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

The intention was to give designers and specifiers within the healthcare sector more information about the most commonly used floor covering materials, their properties and advantages.

The symposium began with two healthcare professionals explaining their flooring requirements followed by talks from three leading flooring manufacturers.

The first presentation was by one of the hospital's capital planning managers, **Adrian Clement**. He explained the importance of choosing the right appearance in a floor covering, as well as the right material itself. He showed slides of very dowdy looking areas and the transformation when a little imagination was used in designing the colour scheme.

Perhaps the most dramatic presentation was from **Sue Fisher**, St Thomas' site manager in charge of what the hospital calls 'Hotel Services', what we would call 'housekeeping'. She is responsible for floor cleaning, and

she had many scathing things to say about badly laid floors that created cleaning problems.

She also referred to a recent NHS directive, that rooms vacated by infectious patients must be steam-cleaned before being re-allocated to a new patient. This created quite a stir among the manufacturers and was raised again in the final brainstorming session.

It seems that many manufacturers do not provide assurances regarding the steam cleaning of their materials. Much depends on the temperature and pressure under which the steam is projected at the floor.

More important is the incidence of steam cleaning. Nora (Freudenberg) are happy with their rubber flooring being steam cleaned, but no more than half-dozen times a year. I think this matter needs to be considered by the CFA Manufacturers' Committee and I have referred it to Richard Catt.

There followed presentations by **Paul Webb** of Altro, **Chris Arkell** of Nora and **Allan Gibson** of Forbo. All gave excellent introductions to their flooring materials. Paul Webb explained the advantages of vinyl flooring – strength, ease of maintenance, sustainability.

There were questions on cleaning safety flooring. Obviously

the more non-slip a floor covering, the harder its maintenance. However, cleaned according to the manufacturer's direction, it should not be a problem.

Chris Arkell explained that Nora rubber flooring does not require dressing or coating. Interestingly, neither rubber or linoleum really need welding. Of course, hospitals like welded floors, and both Nora and Forbo have good systems involving both hot and cold welding.

It was mentioned how some floors have pretty motifs cut into them using water jet cutting. I remember a children's hospital in Homerton where the floor pictured fishes swimming along a stream. These motifs are never welded. Perhaps the healthcare sector should re-think its attitude to welding. It is often easier to get a perfect seam with a butt joint, rather than a weld.

Allan Gibson outlined the history of linoleum in Scotland and facts about the material itself. Forbo now offers marbled welds that are almost invisible.

The three manufacturers' spokespeople each very ably fielded questions from the floor. They appeared as a kind of flooring 'brains trust' with myself as chairman.

Some flooring contractors in the

audience explained their difficulty in carrying out flooring installations or repairs in hospitals, when inadequate facilities or insufficient time is allocated.

Another matter that emerged was that a 'standard maintenance system' is employed for hospital floors. The maintenance staff do not say this is rubber, we will use method A, but that one is linoleum so we will use method B.

All flooring tends to receive the same treatment. I do not think this is a good thing, unless all manufacturers can agree a single maintenance programme, which I doubt.

The manufacturers present, of course, pointed out that their floorcoverings rely on the correct and properly carried out subfloor preparation.

No adhesive or screed manufacturers attended, which was a pity, because that might have been useful in discussing the current 'fast track' methods.

Manufacturers and installers all agreed that many flooring problems were caused by insufficient installation time, but that is another story! **CFJ**

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Nick Gooderson on the new construction diploma

Getting recruits to hit the ground running

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