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NEWS

HOSPITALS TURN TO ALL-IN-ONE SPEAKERS

As the US health care system upgrades or replaces outdated hospitals from the 60's and 70's, research shows that taking measures to decrease patient stress and instil a sense of control can reduce anxiety and the use of pain-controlled opioid medications, while improving cooperation and clinical outcomes. Toward this end, room designs traditionally packed with several patients per room are being replaced or supplemented with single-occupancy rooms. This provides more patient privacy in accord with HIPAA regulations, along with improved sleep, environmental control, and a lower infection risk.

The benefits of such a patient-centered hospital environment are increasingly being extended to in-room audio, where advanced design allows more patient control, better audio quality, and a streamlined architecture. In the past, each hospital room often contained several patients and several speaker for each. The background noise from all these speakers could be a problem at times; audio quality could be subpar, and speakers had to be replaced regularly. Consequently, hospitals are moving away from a multitude of speakers in traditional patient rooms to fewer, better, more durable speakers in private rooms.

Technology has advanced to the point where a single self-amplified all-in-one speaker set, like those available from OWI, can enhance patient control of audio while replacing several separate speakers and improving sound quality. Such all-in-one speakers further streamline the process by combining the speakers, amplifier, volume control, and input plate. To improve clinical communication, such all-in-one speakers can also provide a priority override that automatically mutes music or TV in the patient's room when a nurse call or emergency notification is announced. If there is a power outage in the hospital or local area, the speaker priority override messages can still come through, when connected to a paging system that is connected to a failsafe UPS device.

"Overhead, all-in-one speakers with wireless Bluetooth connectivity like OWI's allow patients to more conveniently control song selection and volume from their iPhones or MP3 devices without plugging into the wall or having to reach for wall or pillow speaker controls," says Jud Miles, a senior designer at RTKL, a global architectural design consulting firm that offers patient-oriented healthcare design, among other specialties. "By connecting wirelessly to the overhead speaker, patients can listen to their own song selections from bed with audio quality much better than typical pillow speakers. Because patients do not touch the speaker, the system will last much longer than pillow speakers."