

Penn State Hershey Cancer Institute, Hershey, United States

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Translational architecture: a new breed of healthcare

Payette's new cancer centre brings research and treatment together



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Completed in 2009, the Penn State Cancer Institute is the new cornerstone of the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center campus. The project goal is challenging: to affect a paradigm shift that houses cancer research and cancer care together in an inspirational, interactive setting. This unified environment cultivates the translation of scientific discoveries that advance and accelerate patient-focused cancer care.

The project is a turning point where an introverted, 1960's pastoral campus is transformed. A bold architectural form, the 'arc', brings together over thirty disparate groups into a single structure. The unification of these disparate functions (main hospital entry, outpatient cancer care and academic research) strengthens the overall sense of place and community. An essential design principle provides all occupants with strong connections to nature, unlike most peer structures.

Cancer treatment suites are on two floors, fronting a healing garden that abuts the existing mega-structure and conceals underground service spaces. The garden, designed with native vegetation to present year-round interest, gives all patients access to the outdoors, intimate views, daylight and controlled levels of privacy or interaction.

With USGBC-LEED Certification, the project showcases sustainable features and exceeds energy performance criteria by 15% despite demanding use typologies. To embody the institute's mission, a bright, central five-storey atrium visually connects patients, researchers and administrative staff. The innovative configuration permits an unprecedented openness between disparate occupancies, even deep below grade. These visual links constantly reinforce the collective presence and the interactions of others hard at work within the institute.

Post-occupancy evaluations report increased patient access to treatment options along with a vastly improved care experience. Staff reports a marked augmentation of inter- and intra-disciplinary interactions, cross-collaborations and improved organisational efficacy. Campus growth now continues with construction of an adjacent Children's Hospital, extending the architecture and the 'arc' that defines this successful project.