



Sustainable Environment and the built Space: Integrating Ecology, Planning and Human Well-being

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**RESTORATIVE STAFF SPACES IN HOSPITALS: HOW BREAK ENVIRONMENTS, ACCESS,
AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE SHAPE NURSES' RECOVERY, WELL-BEING, AND
WORK FUNCTIONING**

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Abstract

Nurses are among the most occupationally depleted healthcare workers worldwide. Their work is cognitively demanding, emotionally taxing, physically repetitive, and frequently shift-based, generating cumulative fatigue that cannot be fully resolved within a single working shift. Although break policies and occupational health programmes have received considerable research attention, the built environments in which nurses rest remain systematically understudied. This narrative review synthesises evidence from occupational health psychology, environmental psychology, and healthcare facility design to examine how hospital break environments can be redesigned to support faster and higher-quality within-shift recovery for nurses. Three core recovery mechanisms are identified: psychological detachment, psychophysiological down-regulation, and cognitive restoration, and four modifiable environmental levers are proposed: spatial separation, sensory regulation, nature contact, and choice and control. A typology of restorative spaces is presented alongside an analysis of the organisational and structural barriers that limit uptake of breaks. The review concludes with a context-sensitive framework adapted specifically for Nigerian teaching hospitals, where staffing constraints, infrastructure limitations, and cultural norms around rest create distinctive challenges. Rapid within-shift recovery is argued to depend not on any single design feature but on the joint engineering of space, policy, and workflow.

Keywords: Break rooms; Burnout; Fatigue; Nurse recovery; Restorative environments