

## Nature Scenes and Hospital Recovery

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**Nature Scenes and  
Hospital Recovery**

**Authors**

This blog is written by

9/15/2016

2 Comments



Being surrounded by nature can have a profoundly positive effect on us. When we need these effects even more, when we are recovering from injury or illness or are in the hospital, how can we still benefit without access to the outdoors? Research shows that even just photos of nature can help reduce stress levels and that a nature view from a window can help improve recovery. Maria Janowiak tells us about experiencing this herself when she found herself spending hours in a hospital with only a little hint of nature to help make it more bearable.

## Nature Scenes and Hospital Recovery

It was the peak of summer and we found ourselves in the hospital. My husband had broken his ankle playing baseball and needed surgery to secure one of the broken bones back into its

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proper place. It was not a lot of fun—especially not for him—but it did give me the opportunity to see the results of some nature-based research in action.

We were placed in a hospital room that would serve as our home base before and after the surgery. The wall that divided the hospital room from the hallway was actually a large glass door that could be opened to allow the bed to be rolled to the operating room. To provide privacy, a large curtain covered the entire glass wall. The curtain was pale green and made of a slightly satiny fabric. I normally wouldn't have paid much attention to it, except that I immediately noticed that it had a large nature scene printed on it, covering an area at least 4 feet tall and 6 feet wide right in front of the hospital bed.

I thought this was clever on the part of the hospital, as views of nature—even in the form of photographs—have been shown to reduce patient stress and facilitate healing.

Dr. Roger Ulrich was one of the first researchers to study this effect, and his studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed that photographs of nature reduced stress compared to those of urban environments.

A foundational study in 1984

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found that hospital patients with windows that looked out to natural settings had better recoveries than those without windows.

I've been aware of this research for a while, but it was interesting to see it—and experience it—in real life. Even though I didn't really like the picture and even though I didn't think the scene was that pretty as far as scenic pictures go, I could definitely see the benefit to having it there.

If it wasn't there, the curtain probably would have been some hideous pattern that matched the couches in the waiting room. Without the nature scene the hospital room would have felt impersonal, institutional. It still felt that way, but perhaps slightly less so.



*This is a picture of the hospital curtain that provided Maria and her husband with a welcome distraction and a little timely forest therapy.*

*The photo above was taken by Maria and shows the landscape nearby her home.*

*The "real life" picture of nature provides a pretty striking contrast to the nature scene displayed on the hospital curtain however even that seemingly incomparable image helped to refocus her and her husbands attention away from an unpleasant situation.*

And it was nice to have something to look at. We waited in that room for more than two hours before the surgery, which was boring.

The photo captured my interest right away as something interesting too look at. It provided the "soft fascination" that is thought to make nature scenes so relaxing—there are many things that allowed my attention to wander across the scene without demanding my attention the way that electronics or busy streets do.

He noticed the photograph too. We spent time trying to identify the trees and plants in the picture and talked

about places of which it reminded us.

There was a large window in the room too. It was behind the hospital bed and looked out onto a parking lot, but it did provide a lot of natural light to the room. The nurse gave us permission to adjust the shades however we wanted, and at some point I stood up to stretch and opened them wide to check on the weather. It was especially windy that day, with gusts strong enough to bend the boles of the smaller trees in swooping angles. It was a dramatic difference from the feeling indoors where the building's walls buffered the sound and feeling of the outside wind, leaving nothing but the still, sterile hospital air to sit in and wait.

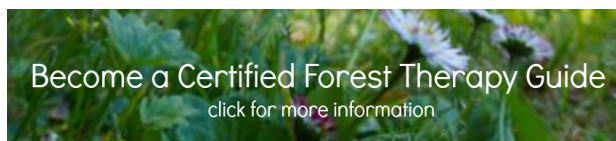
There are a million ways that hospital rooms could be better, and of course it's preferable to never be there at all, but it is nice to know that some people are designing the spaces and making them a little more humane.

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*Maria Janowiak lives in a little house in a big woods in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She uses her professional background in forest ecology and management to translate the latest complex science into useable information for normal folks. She writes about exploring the outdoors, everyday adventures, and vibrant, simple living at [www.MariaJanowiak.com](http://www.MariaJanowiak.com).*

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British bestessay

9/20/2016 02:39:45 am

It is true that being surrounded by nature can really have a positive effects in our lives. It enables our mind to relax from all of the problems that we are experiencing in life and also it can comfort us simply because of the natural sounds that we are hearing from nature it is really a true gift for all of us

**REPLY**

**Alex Gaut**

10/25/2016 09:24:29 pm

In Adelaide, we are very lucky that a new hospital has been built with these principles in mind. They have designed it so that all the patient rooms have a few over a river and parklands that are situated near the city. And they also designed the rooms so that the patient bed faces the window to see the view. The window is quite long, so that the internal window sill is also a sitting place for visitors, and can even convert to a bed for overnight family members. For all the expense, problems and criticism that this new hospital has faced (it's still not finished) at least they got this bit right!

**REPLY**



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**"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." —John Muir**

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