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DESIGN

# The power of color in healthcare

Harnessing the power of color is an invaluable asset in healthcare.

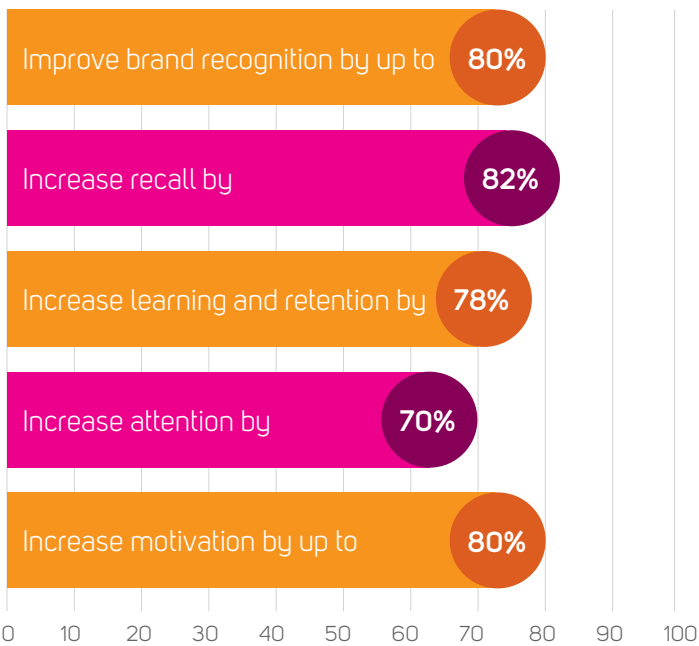
Whether building hospital environments, ensuring patient compliance, or creating a resonant brand identity, color plays a significant role. It can stimulate emotion, trigger memory, and create recognition, which can mean big business in the healthcare arena.

**Choose your color wisely**

Strategic use of color differentiates companies and products, as well as evokes mood and feelings—positively or negatively—and therefore, attitudes about a brand. People make up their minds about a product within 90 seconds of their initial interaction, and 62% to 90% of that decision is based on color alone.<sup>1</sup>

Using color to highlight critical information directly influences human behavior, making impressions more memorable and increasing viewer engagement.<sup>2</sup>

**The benefits of deliberate use of color can:<sup>2</sup>**



**Leveraging the basic principles of color creates a brand that resonates with stakeholders globally**

Color choice isn't just about what the client likes. Strategic designers must use color psychology, and cultural principles to support a brand's strategy when developing a distinctive and ownable palette for a brand.<sup>3</sup>

Blues promote thoughtfulness, have a soothing effect, and are often associated with the coolness of the sea and sky, both calming constants. Blue also represents success, trust, and security, so it's not surprising that it's the most popular color for corporate logos around the world.<sup>3-5</sup> Cultural differences also play a role: for example, in Japan, where traffic lights are blue, yellow, and red, blue and green are interchangeable.<sup>6</sup>

Reds, on the other hand, are stimulating—they capture attention, increase heart rate, encourage appetite, raise blood pressure, and arouse feelings of power.<sup>4,5</sup> On the other hand, to an accountant, red means financial loss, and in India, red is a color of purity worn by brides.

Marketers and designers must also take into account that 8% of people—mostly men—are color blind. The most prevalent difficulty is distinguishing between red and green, while another common type has trouble differentiating blue and yellow.<sup>7</sup> So knowing your audience and culture, as well as how they may perceive different hues, is key when developing a color palette.

### **The impact of color may be even greater—and carry greater consequences—in healthcare**

In healthcare environments, color and nature are often used to maximize the effect of healing. Architects and interior designers develop therapeutic surroundings to promote healing, creating visual serenity for patients that are very ill and visual stimulation for those who are recuperating.<sup>8</sup> Even the amber/orange color that's been used in prescription bottles for over 100 years is deliberate. The amber color is functional, it protects medication from sunlight, and easily recognizable, aiding in safety.

In fact, color plays a significant role in the medications themselves by creating emotional appeal and reducing medical errors. Patients respond best when color corresponds with the end benefit of the medication. Strategic designers would hesitate to use a red capsule for acid reflux or a bile green pill for nausea—but they know that a calm blue tablet offers a good night's sleep, while bright red can deliver speedy relief.<sup>9</sup>

A new study found that patients may even stop taking a generic medication because of a change in color or shape. According to that study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, heart attack patients were almost 29% more likely to discontinue therapy that suddenly looked different, significantly increasing health risks. The researchers concluded that pill shape and color are “functional,” because they help promote patient adherence to medication.<sup>10</sup>

Even healthcare professionals themselves are not immune to color effects. Color coordination between a presenter's clothing and clinical posters “may substantially increase the popularity of the poster and the likelihood that the research will be disseminated,” report David Keegan and Susan Bannister at the University of Western Ontario.

The differences between coordinated and clashing attire was statistically significant. So they recommend that when presenting data at a meeting, researchers dress for the occasion.<sup>11</sup>

### **A distinctive color palette not only evokes emotion, differentiates, and clarifies, it helps build brand equity**

Many of the world's most recognized brands use color as a powerful tool, because strategic designers understand that color is rooted in psychology. Color's psychological effect is instantaneous because it stimulates the senses, and its power of persuasion can lead to action. Understanding the meaning and associations of color can increase the effectiveness of a brand. Researchers at the University of Missouri recently verified that colors used in a company's logo have a significant impact on how the brand as a whole is viewed.<sup>12</sup>

Color can be so differentiating that entire campaigns in healthcare have been built around it. By transforming what could have been a plain white pill into a unique brand image, one marketer urged consumers to “ask your doctor about the purple pill.”<sup>9</sup>

Color can affect business, in fact, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) filed an injunction against Novartis to protect its own inhaler's branded purple color from their rival generic product, AirFluSal Fospiro. Glaxo says customers recognize their own \$9 billion-a-year asthma treatment Advair by its color and Fospiro's release could result in “confusion among patients, pharmacists and healthcare providers.”<sup>13</sup>

A consistent use of a brand's palette across all communication channels improves recognition and builds brand equity.

## The power of color may be greater than even marketers think

Neuroscientist Bevil Conway believes the science behind how humans process color to be very powerful. "Knowing that humans might....be hardwired for certain hues could be a gateway into understanding the neural properties of emotion."<sup>14</sup>

The power that color wields is seen at every level of communication and every stakeholder experience, making it an invaluable asset in healthcare. **Are you harnessing the power of color for your healthcare brand?**



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