Canada Science and Technology Museum

The green artifact spotlight will be at the Canada Science and Technology Museum until April 2010.

the environment” whereas “soft colours on walls tend to minimize the environment as a source of interest. Here there will be more of an inward attitude and attention.”

“Green is one of the best of all hues,” he wrote. It is “fresh in appearance and slightly passive in quality.”³

It calmed patients and workers and invited inward repose. Misty green, derived from colour schemes he developed for the US Navy, came to be one of the more popular shades used by medical instrument makers.

These colour trends travelled north. By 1945, an official at the Canadian Medical Association claimed that colour had become an item of “major importance” in the psychological treatment of a patient by promoting serenity of mind and restfulness.⁴ Ten years later a *CMAJ* editor noted that the use of colour was one of the most radical changes in the modern ward. He wrote, on the other hand, that we should not get carried away “with all this” and find our wards covered in green walls and red ceilings.⁵

But his cautionary words were too late, as green was rapidly finding its way into Canadian hospitals. In 1955,

one of Canada’s pioneering neurosurgeons, Dr. William Feindel, opened a neurosurgery unit at the University Hospital in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, complete with a cutting-edge green surgical suite. When Feindel asked, however, if he could install more

viewing screens on the walls, the chief of surgery reluctantly agreed, warning that the architects would not like to see their beautiful green tiles covered (personal communication).

In other words, green had become a major symbol of the modern hospital, advocated by hospital administrators and architects, and would remain a staple of the medical experience well into the 1970s.

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Memories of medical green. Do you have a tale to tell about green in medicine? Post your comments online or email the author at dpantalony@technomuses.ca

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