

A spirit of adventure

Manchester is the location for what is likely to be an unprecedented, transformational learning experience this October, intended for those committed to improving healthcare via design. James Parker previews 'Praxis One.'

Araxis is a term that is defined in the Collins Oxford Dictionary as meaning "The practising of an art or skill," and also "an accepted practice or custom." But the first definition certainly has more relevance than the latter in the case of Praxis One, an event being held from 9-12 October in Manchester. It is being launched with the intention of snapping professionals out of received ideas, to explore new approaches. As the brochure says, it "will challenge you to ask far-reaching questions and to discover practical answers."

The invite-only audience of 350 healthcare, design and facilities professionals will be in for something of a shock if they are expecting the standard one-way dialogue conference set-up, with case studies (often soullessly) presented in turn. At Praxis, innovative and useful ideas will not be buried beneath a tired and stagnant format that prevents the attendees being truly energised into action. ('CPD' could be an acronym for 'Critically Ponderous Delivery'; it's a tragedy that so much effort is wasted on events that don't actually demonstrate user benefit.)

So the agenda being forged for Praxis by its organiser, Wayne Ruga, head of design advocacy network Caritas, is to involve delegates fully in the experience from the off. Ruga pioneered a new model for such events at his Symposia for Healthcare Design in the US in the late 1980s and 1990s, but he admits that even they fell somewhat into the mode of standard case study presentations, and lost their transformational edge. Of course, a word like 'transformational' can be a

double-edged sword – while it sounds attractive to those who already buy into the idea that perhaps their ways of working are not the last word in their particular field, it may also alienate and confuse those who may be more sceptical about anything that suggests 'audience participation'. However, whether or not the speaker list, (which includes a variety of eminent professionals, from designers to MP Hazel Blears) are preaching to the converted, it is to be celebrated that this groundbreaking event is happening here in the UK.

The event is being billed as an 'Expedition,' and the goals achieved will not be obvious at the start, says Ruga.

The 'Beacon' sessions should help light the way however.

Ruga fervently believes that improving healthcare via design is as much, if not more, about improving one's personal approach to life and work as it is about room data sheets and briefing. The cross-disciplinary nature of the invited audience will aid the fertilisation of the currently often barren soil of design in healthcare, and leaders should emerge re-energised.

Over the next few issues, *HD* will be featuring a series of 'Footsteps to Praxis': guides for what should be a fascinating journey, presented by participants (see p22).

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VISIONS OF PRAXIS ONE

It provides an opportunity as well as a challenge for individuals to join together to explore, share, collaborate, and create new processes for creating environments that can positively impact the world.

George Pressler, president, Planning and Design Resources Inc

At Praxis I am expecting a learning experience that is more revolutionary than evolutionary – more bold than incremental.

Mardelle Shepley, Associate Dean for Student Services, College of Architecture, Texas A&M University

I want to go home after Praxis with 349 business cards in my pocket of like-minded leaders who are willing to be available and supportive in working toward actively producing a cultural renaissance in healthcare – where we work together in creating a new system that is based on collaborative values, and is integrated across disciplinary boundaries.

Wayne Ruga, architect, founder, The Caritas Project

I am looking forward to a high level of mutual commitment to do what we all know to be the right thing – creating organisations and buildings that really work for people and for those who work and live in them.

John Zeisel, president, Hearthstone Alzheimer Care