

The Patient Journey in practice

A patient journey map is an overview of the different stages that a patient is experiencing during the process of healing in combination with the people and services that the patient meets. A patient journey can be used to gain insight in the interactions, emotions and barriers for the patient and other participants in the process. The patient journey can also be used at the beginning of an innovation process to create a systematic overview. It allows you to gain a better understanding of the entire process.

Therefore, having a patient journey allows designers to take a more holistic approach to the problem, taken into account different stages in the healthcare journey and the involvement of different actors.

For example, when you design a tool that will help the surgeon to place a prosthesis during surgery, your main problem or concern may be the positioning of the prosthesis. And if your scope is too narrow, you only focus on the technical aspects of the tool. But you also need to take into account the entire logistics of the tool in the hospital, (including sterilization), the purchase process of new equipment in that specific hospital, the interference of the tool with the current operation process (you do not want to increase the time of the surgery), and the production process of the manufacturer. Because if you do not take into account the broader perspective, solving the main problem has generated many new problems.

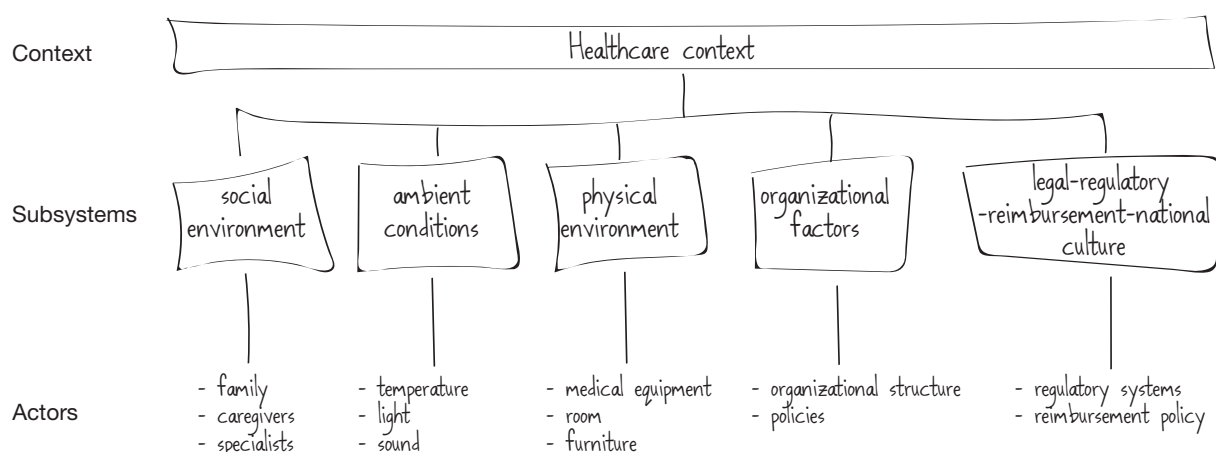
Healthcare context

Before you can start making a patient journey it is important that we define a context for our healthcare problem. In this course we build on the definition that Bogner uses in the Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics in Healthcare. (Bogner in Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics in Health Care and Patient Safety, 2007)

The healthcare context is the physical and informational environment in which the healthcare processes take place. It can be divided as follows.

Division of subsystems of the healthcare context:

1. *the ambient conditions (temperature, light);*
2. *the physical environment (medical equipment, room, furniture);*
3. *the social environment (family, caregivers, specialists);*
4. *organizational factors (organizational structure, policies);*
5. *legal-regulatory-reimbursement-national culture (regulatory systems, reimbursement policy).*



The actors

The subsystems of the healthcare context contain actors. An **actor can be any person, product or service that contributes to the healthcare process**. The actors can be divided in human actors and non-human actors. The human actors are often from the social environment, the specialist, family, informal caregivers etc. The non-human actors can often be found in the ambient, physical, organizational and legal-regulatory subsystems.

In this course, there is a slight difference in definition between actors and stakeholders that you should be aware of. The term stakeholder comes from business theory and according to Post, Preston, Sachs (2002) a stakeholder is "A person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organization. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies." Wikipedia, retrieved January 30, 2017.

For example, when you design a new product to reduce the time in the OR, the financial department of the hospital is an actor in the patient journey if it actively has an influence on the design of the new product. If they do not influence the design of the new product, they are a stakeholder in the organization (of the hospital), because it is in their financial interest to reduce time in the OR, but they are not involved in the new product that will be used in the healing process of a patient.

An actor is everyone and everything that can actively contribute to the healing process of the patient. The difference between an actor and stakeholder is that an actor does not have to be a person and that the contribution of an actor is to the **healing process** instead of to an **organization** (in the case of a stakeholder).

Interdependencies

To create an overview of the healthcare context you have to get a better understanding how the actors relate to each other. Therefore, it is important to identify how the actors can influence other actors.

Often the actors have interdependencies with multiple actors, who can also have interdependencies with each other, this illustrates the complexity of the healthcare system. Therefore, it is important to make a systematic overview of the context in to ensure you get a complete and broad understanding of the context.

For example, if you take the context of a hip surgery patient, the actors can be: the patient, the specialist, the nurse, the operating room and the hospital bed. In this example the patient, specialist and the nurse are human actors and the operating room and hospital bed and are the non-human actors.

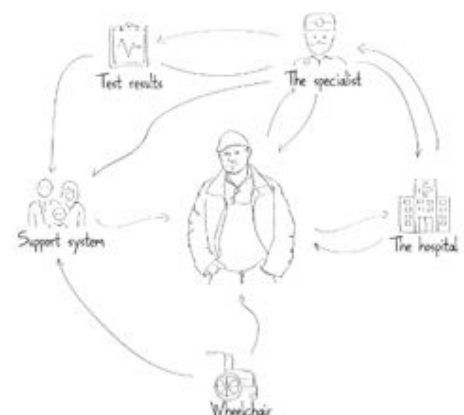
From the patient to the specialist: the patient gives information to the specialist about his health conditions, his complaints, and his wishes.

From the specialist to the patient: the specialist communicates a diagnosis and recommends a treatment and a planning. The specialist and the operating room (OR): the specialist deals with the experience of the team in the OR, the availability of equipment, the anaesthesiologist. The patient and the hospital bed: The bed can influence the mobility of the patient in a very early phase after the operation.

Identification of actors & interdependencies

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Often in the beginning of an innovation process you do not have this complete overview of the context. Then, it is important to first define what you do know. A good starting point is to make a first mind map of the context. When you make a mind map of the context you visualise all the actors and the interdependencies that you can think of. Read more about mind map on the [industrial design engineering wiki](#).



Often your own basic knowledge is not enough to create a complete overview of the context. Therefore, it is important to gather more data by (internet)research, shadow and interview the patient and when you identify new human actors, shadow and interview the actors and, when you encounter non-human actors, shadow the product or service. Shadowing is the preferred method, where you follow the actor in the context as if you are a fly on the wall, but often this is not possible or too time consuming. Then, interviewing actors and internet research are also good alternatives. For internet research Wikipedia and patient information pages from hospitals or patient associations are always good places to start your search.

The power of visualisation

A picture is a very strong way to communicate your findings. This is also the case with actor mapping. Because you would like to see the relations between the actors, a list will not do. You can start with a list just to get started, but the next step is to put the actors in relation with each other. It can be a puzzle to create this overview, but the activity will also help you gain a broader understanding of the context and you will identify actors easier in a map when having a picture or an icon instead of a word.