

## Case Study

# Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead



In 2008, the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead carried out a signing initiative that involved the extensive use of graphic landmark images to help people identify and remember specific locations. This initiative was to extend to appointment letters but was not fully developed. Subsequent patient and visitor feedback determined that the signing was not working satisfactorily and it was decided that a 'back to basics' approach to the signing would give better results.

The key wayfinding issue to address, was that there are two lift cores, one that only goes to the lower floors and one that goes to all floors. It was important to get people to the correct lift. The lift that goes to all floors is heavily over-subscribed and it was a fundamental requirement that people using facilities on the lower floors should be directed to the secondary lifts.

As a large number of the location and ward signs were being retained, it was sensible that the graphic design should be in keeping with the originals; white Frutiger text on a neutral grey background. However an element of colour coding was introduced where facilities that were most visited, like 'Blood Tests', were highlighted with a coloured bar. This allows the viewer to quickly pick out the key locations while scanning a long list.

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The hospital had found the maintenance and updating of the existing sign hardware slow and expensive. The sign content was required to change frequently as the hospital has an ongoing refurbishment programme. It was discovered that the hospital had in-house digital printing facilities and it was decided that the most cost effective and responsive way to proceed, was to develop a holder for digitally printed signs. This meant that the hospital could produce their own prints and they could be installed by their own staff.

In order that people had confidence in them, the products still had to have credibility as signs and not look like posters in poster cases. A product was selected that comprised of discreet aluminium brackets holding a sheet of toughened safety glass and backed with a laminate board. The printed information was sandwiched between the two sheets and held in place by the brackets. An anti-glare finish was added to the tempered glass to ensure that the sign could be read easily in all sorts of lighting conditions.

The new signs were installed in a busy, working hospital, so the installation had to be carefully scheduled to ensure that people remained informed at all times.

The signs have only been installed for a short time but the hospital has received positive feedback from members of the public.

