

Outpatient Care in Contemporary Healthcare



An outpatient centre, often referred to as ambulatory care, represents a key component of modern healthcare systems by providing diagnosis, treatment, and minor surgical procedures without the need for overnight hospitalisation. This approach not only enhances patient comfort and accessibility but also contributes to the overall efficiency of healthcare delivery by reducing the burden on inpatient facilities.

In Germany, outpatient care occupies a particular position within the healthcare system, characterised by a dense network of independently practising specialists and general practitioners, as well as medical care centres (Medizinisches Versorgungszentrum/MVZ) operating outside hospitals. At the same time, outpatient departments within hospitals also play an important role in providing specialised diagnostic and treatment services without inpatient admission. Historically, models such as the “Polikliniken” in the former East Germany offered a more integrated, multidisciplinary approach, bringing together a wide range of medical services under one roof.

Today, in times of demographic change, the rise in chronic diseases, and ongoing technological developments, there is a renewed interest in rethinking outpatient centres as hybrid spaces that merge medical, organisational, and architectural innovation. These developments raise important questions about how such facilities can be designed to support efficient workflows, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a patient-centred environment.

In this context, outpatient facilities can take different organisational forms: they may be attached to hospitals or function as independent units, each model presenting distinct spatial and logistical implications. A defining characteristic of ambulatory care is the high turnover of patients, as many procedures are relatively simple and require only short visits. As a result, such centres must be designed to accommodate large numbers of patients and accompanying persons efficiently. At the

same time, patients often arrive accompanied by family members or friends, who may remain on site throughout the treatment process, placing additional demands on waiting areas and shared spaces.

Healthcare systems are increasingly shifting treatments into outpatient settings due to their cost-effectiveness, comparable quality of care, and reduced stress for patients (reducing psychological barriers). This ongoing transition is leading to a continuous expansion in the scale and complexity of outpatient centres, making it essential to consider growth, flexibility, and user dynamics as integral aspects of their architectural and organisational design.

Design Assignment: Adaptive Reuse and Urban Context

Building on these considerations, participants in the Summer School 2026 are invited to develop a conceptual proposal for an outpatient centre that addresses both architectural and medical requirements. The design assignment will focus on two distinct sites in Berlin: the main building of the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin at the Campus Virchow-Klinikum, and a former Karstadt department store located at Leopoldplatz. In both cases, the existing structures are to be understood as valuable resources whose potential for adaptive reuse should be critically explored.

The assignment encourages participants to engage with the specific spatial, structural, and urban conditions of each site, while developing innovative strategies for their transformation into contemporary healthcare environments. This includes addressing the differing contexts of a hospital campus and an inner-city commercial building, as well as their respective roles within the wider healthcare network, particularly in relation to the interface between inpatient and outpatient care. Special emphasis is placed on questions of sustainability and resource-conscious design: rather than proposing demolition and replacement, students are asked to work with the existing buildings, considering aspects such as material reuse, structural adaptation, and long-term spatial flexibility.

Architectural, Social and Environmental Considerations

In doing so, participants should reflect on how architectural healthcare design can respond to the evolving demands of ambulatory care—balancing efficiency with patient experience, integrating diverse medical functions, and accommodating high user volumes within coherent spatial organisations. At the same time, the proposals should engage with the social context and immediate surroundings of each site, exploring how an outpatient centre can open up to the surrounding urban neighbourhood and contribute to local communities. This includes considering accessibility, public interfaces, hierarchy of functions and the potential for shared or complementary uses that strengthen the relationship between healthcare provision and everyday urban life (potential of cross over concepts).

The aim is to develop forward-looking concepts that not only meet functional and medical requirements but also foster social integration, while contributing to a more sustainable and resilient built environment. The proposals have the potential to introduce a new approach to the discourse on how to deal with abandoned or outdated typologies.

Summer School HOSPITAL + THE CITY

The outcomes of this Summer School will be developed and discussed within the framework of *HOSPITAL + THE CITY*, which adopts an interdisciplinary approach to hospital planning in the urban context. The programme is aimed at professionals and master's students seeking to deepen their understanding of the complex relationships between healthcare architecture, urban planning, healthcare management, and public health. It brings together participants from a wide range of disciplines—including architecture, urban planning, public health, life sciences, sociology, and economics—fostering an exchange of perspectives and expertise.

Throughout the summer school, participants will engage in an intensive programme of site visits, collaborative group work, and lectures delivered by experts from both academia and professional practice. This setting provides an opportunity to critically reflect on the role of healthcare facilities within the urban context, and to situate individual design proposals within broader societal and spatial frameworks.

The ENAH Summer School will take place from 20–24 July 2026 in Berlin, offering a dynamic environment in which to explore the future of outpatient care and its integration into the city.



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DHZBerlin

URL: Deutsches Herzzentrum Berlin - Deutsches Herzzentrum der Charité – Wikipedia (04.05.2026)

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Karstadt

URL: Jetzt ist es raus: Ist das Warenhaus am Leo endgültig tot? – Weddingweiser (04.05.2026)