



Natural light enhances operating theatres at the Hospital for Specialist Surgery, says surgeon John Fox. PHOTO: PETER BRAIG

Would you like surgery with that?

Healthcare A new private hospital raises the bar for comfort.

Jessica Gardner

For the first time in his 23-year career as an orthopaedic surgeon Dr John Fox will be able to pause part way through a hip replacement, just for a moment, and look out a window.

Locating operating theatres around the outside of the third floor of a new luxury private hospital, to capitalise on natural light, was just one of the benefits of doctors getting a say in the design of the new facility in Sydney's north-west, Fox says.

The 10 theatres even look over a lake on the 1.9-hectare site in Bella Vista. "Hospitals are generally designed by architects who haven't even been in an operating room," he says.

The \$100 million Hospital for Specialist Surgery, which opened this month, was built to capitalise on the growing number of people with private

health insurance. It also taps into the booming, increasingly affluent population in Sydney's north-west. One of Healthscope's best hospitals, the Norwest with more than 200 beds, is a five-minute drive away.

The number of Australians with private health cover rose to 11.3 million in 2014-15, from 10 million five years earlier.

Those patients are demanding ever-higher levels of care.

Patients obviously want the best care, but aren't afraid to complain about the comfort of their bed, or the taste of their food either.

With that in mind, the 48 doctors who own HSS engaged a caterer to design a slick menu and cafe.

Patients in the 80 beds can tuck into poached eggs for breakfast, spinach, pumpkin and barley risotto for lunch and country lamb pie for dinner. A select few who are on the mend post-surgery, can even sip a glass of wine.

By delivering more than "a slice of toast and a plastic container of marmalade", the hospital can head off one of the biggest complaints, Fox says. "We know from our surveys that iron-

ically, food is one of the most important things [for patients]."

The group also worked with interior design experts to give the building, which was a refitted former pharmaceutical company head office, a "high-quality hotel finish".

There is an onsite gym, rehabilitation pool and conference rooms. "This has never been done in the world before – retasking an office building into a surgical facility," he claims.

Most patients will come for orthopaedic procedures, while colo-rectal and breast surgeries for cancer patients will also be common, he says.

The crucial part of the business model – which, along with a 100-page feasibility report, he used to persuade NAB to lend about half of the \$100 million start-up costs – was controlling the land and the lease, he says.

Fox says he is looking for more sites for his next facility. He also hopes HSS can be a model for more doctor-designed, owned and run facilities, which are more common in the United States, where he did his specialist training. "They really can control a great deal more of their own destiny," he says.