

Using a Practice Based Enquiry approach to reclaim occupation-focused practice in a forensic mental health setting

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Introduction: Providing occupation focused practice can be challenging in a forensic mental health setting due factors including restrictive environments; role diffusion; and limited literature to guide practice. Inadequate access to meaningful occupation in turn limits the potential for mental health recovery in this setting. It was acknowledged that there was a need to enhance the unique contribution of Occupational Therapists within forensic mental health in order to improve opportunities for participation, and promote the health and well-being of Forensic Patients.

Method: A group of Occupational Therapists and an academic formed a community of practice scholars, and a Practice Based Enquiry (PBE) approach was adopted to refocus on occupation-centric services. The PBE approach was phased; Phase One saw the practice scholars develop quality improvement projects to address occupational deprivation for patients within the Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network. Phase Two focused on reflective practice and role promotion, where the practice scholars engaged in reflective journaling. The academic provided guidance through workshops and formal coaching sessions.

Results: To date, outcomes have included increased confidence in promoting the purpose and benefits of occupation to patients and colleagues; using a common language; increased delivery of occupation-focused intervention; and improved reflective practice. By engaging in critical enquiry the group have indeed reclaimed occupation and have increased cohesiveness across the network.

Conclusion: The PBE approach has inspired Occupational Therapists working in a Forensic Mental Health setting to transform their practice, and subsequently the organisational culture, to promote occupation and participation within a restricted environment.