Forensic occupational therapy: rising to the challenge
—Practice guideline development—

○Jane Cronin-Davis (OT)¹, Mandy Lang (OT)², Rhona Macleod (OT)³,
Kathryn Mason (OT)⁴, Mandy Sainty (OT)⁵
¹York St John University, ²Partnerships in Care, UK, ³Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Trust, ⁴South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Trust, ⁵College of Occupational Therapists

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Introduction: The Forensic Forum, part of the College of Occupational Therapists (COT) Specialist Section for Mental Health and has been established for a number of years. One of the aims of the Forum is to promote good practice for occupational therapists working within secure environments. The results from a survey investigating forensic occupational therapy practice indicated that the lack of evidence base was a particular challenge for occupational therapists in this clinical area.

Objective: To respond to this challenge, the Forensic Forum negotiated with COT the opportunity to develop an evidence-based practice guideline for occupational therapists working in secure environments. A specific emphasis is the use of occupation-focused practice, supporting the return of the profession to its fundamental philosophy; and the interrelationship between occupation, health and well-being.

Discussion: This presentation explores the experiences of the Forensic Forum in their development of the practice guideline: Occupational therapists’ use of occupation-focused practice in secure hospitals. The guideline has recently been accredited by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in the UK. Evidence was rigorously collected and appraised which enables standardised implantation.

Conclusion: This paper discusses the guideline and potential impact on clinical practice. It offers occupational therapists the current evidence base for their interventions and long needed commonality as to the role and contribution of occupational therapy within secure care. Surprisingly, there was a better evidence-base than expected.

Contribution to occupational therapy: The guideline is important step for a profession that has come of age, it will assist both experienced and newly qualified occupational therapists and as well as teaching pre-registration students. It helps to inform practice and enable therapists to articulate their specific roles to other members of the clinical teams.