Forensic mental health: a survey exploring current practice

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Introduction: There are consistent calls for contributions to the evidence-base for occupational therapists working in forensic mental health internationally. Student occupational therapists at York St John University have contributed to the evidence by conducting research regarding practice in this clinical area.

Objective: The aim of this survey based research was twofold: to explore theories, models and approaches used by occupational therapists in forensic mental health; and to investigate the use of standardised assessments, including the assessments of risk.

Method: An on-line survey was piloted and administered as part of the forensic research work stream developed by the Research Centre for Occupation and Mental Health. This was distributed to the membership of the Forensic Forum which is part of the College of Occupational Therapists Specialist section for Mental Health in the UK. University-based and College of Occupational Therapists ethical approval was granted.

Results: 50 respondents indicated that the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) and the Recovery Model were the most used; the most popular treatment approach was underpinned by cognitive behaviourial theory; MOHO standardised assessments were often used in addition to multi-disciplinary assessments; all respondents used the HCR-20 as the standardised risk assessment.

Discussion: Standardised assessments were used in forensic practice due to being an organisational requirement and due to their utility as outcome measurements. This paper will present the results of the survey and discuss how the relationship with the current evidence-base and literature.

Conclusion: There is evidence that model of practice are used to underpin occupational therapy interventions in forensic mental health. Standardised assessments, including those related to risk were widely used by the respondents.

Implications for practice: This research provided information for the development of the forensic practice guidelines; however future research is still required regarding the validity of the assessments used.