



Introduction

Forensic psychiatric patients often face complex mental health challenges within secure settings. Taking inspiration from RCPSych's position on sustainability and by extension 'Nature' (3), this abstract proposes a novel approach to rehabilitation in this patient group, by leveraging the healing power of nature. Recognising the transformative potential of nature-based interventions (2), this work aims to serve as a prompt, to open conversations around the subject particularly focusing on our local low secure forensic inpatient set up, and review the feasibility and therapeutic benefits of incorporating nature, more formally, into the rehabilitation processes for our service users.

Background

The traditional model of rehabilitation for forensic psychiatric patients primarily focuses on security and containment. Whilst there have been advances in the uptake of psychosocial initiatives in forensic rehabilitation work (4), due to a range of considerations and barriers, there remains an overall scarcity of nature-based incentives on offer to our service users in secure forensic psychiatry settings (5). Emerging evidence highlights associations between nature exposure and health: positive impact mental and physical health & wellbeing, stress reduction, improved mood, and mental state. There has been additional evidence that exposure to nature led to better cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure and sleep (2) and helps promote mental health and restoration, healthy lifestyle through connection to nature; others; and self (6) and, thereby, rehabilitation and recovery.

Thoughts so far

This project intends to bring these discussions to the forefront of forensic rehabilitation initiatives, and also to bridge the interdisciplinary gap, eg between forensic and rehab psychiatry, as well as sustainability and planetary health and occupational therapy (to name a few). And encouraging sustainable nature-based rehabilitation initiatives to support rehabilitation and recovery of our service users.

Nature-based rehabilitation (NBR)

We take reference from NBR, a multidisciplinary intervention, where nature and garden play an important role and 'rehabilitation' to a large extent takes place in an outdoor setting (1). While the definition, approaches and standardisation of these approaches remain varied, there has been extensive evidence how nature-based approaches lead to positive outcomes in psychiatric illnesses (2) and when employed alongside other rehabilitation interventions like psychoeducation, mindfulness, occupational therapy etc the outcomes are known to be positive.

Methods

To open conversations with stakeholders and patients in our local low secure forensic set up, and review current practices around how, and to what extent our service users are exposed to nature-based interventions. These can include but are not limited to outdoor activities, horticulture therapy, and access to green spaces within secure facilities. We hope that these discussions will lead to a more formal piece of work that entails a multidisciplinary review of feasibility, practicality, and barriers to these provisions

Conclusion

This abstract proposes a scope for further exploration, into the potential benefits of nature-based rehabilitation for our service users. By acknowledging the therapeutic value of nature, this work aims to contribute to the evolving landscape of forensic and rehabilitation psychiatry, by reiterating the benefits of nature-based strategies in recovery and rehabilitation. Fostering sustainable, multi-disciplinary and patient-centred approaches to rehabilitation.

Future Directions

These discussions can have the potential to inform future practices, a focused piece of work, more rigorous study designs, investigation of the underlying mechanisms of the association between green spaces and health, exploring not only the benefits of focused Nature Based Rehabilitation incentives but also to explore the barriers and challenges around implementations of such initiatives, with a goal of contributing to improve the quality of care and well-being for forensic psychiatric patients.

Limitations

In view of dearth of evidence base on the subject matter, it is also important to remain mindful of several limitations of these approaches. First being lack of standardised approaches, which can lead to inconsistent measures of exposure to nature, limitation in measuring the impact, maintaining consistency in the type and quality of green space, duration and frequency of exposure etc. We are hopeful however these discussions can lead to innovative means of incorporating nature-based strategies in psychiatric rehabilitation in forensic settings. And lead to nuanced initiatives, for example adaptable versions of HBR suited to available settings and resources.