

**Enhanced Observations (EO):****How therapeutic are they within a medium secure forensic mental health setting?**

**Aim:** This study aimed to explore patients lived experiences of EO within a medium secure unit (MSU).

**Method:** Four patients (two male, two female) and one staff member completed semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

**Findings:** Five main themes emerged from the analysis that represented the participants' experiences of EO: 1) *Relationship with staff* 2) *Staff qualities* 3) *Difficult experiences* 4) *Loss* 5) *Ways to improve the experience*.

- EO can be helpful and therapeutic, aided by the type of relationship a patient has with staff (known v unknown, existing relationship) as well as staff member's interpersonal skills (respect, understanding, communicating with the patient).
- EO can also remain, at times, counter-therapeutic. Difficulties of the experience (length of time, impact on self, lack of communication) and feelings of loss (privacy and intrusion, freedom, social connectivity) were reported.
- Patients identified ways to improve the experience. Practical: positioning of doors, gender of staff when using facilities and use of shutters to aid privacy. Procedural: Collaboration (paper work), verbal communication and involvement in activities to aid distraction.

**Limitations and Recommendations:** Only 5 people were interviewed in one MSU. The results may not give an accurate picture of the wider patient experience and make it difficult to generalise to other services. Conducting further research within a larger number of hospitals, including different levels of security, would increase sample numbers and could lead to the development of best practice guidance. In addition, a number of themes were not included in the final analysis due to lack of examples across the sample. Future research, with a larger sample, may generate evidence required.

**Conclusion:** Developing service specific guidelines for good practice when conducting EO, which could be embedded within the service policy, alongside staff training, could assist in enhancing patient focused practice. Such work could facilitate a ritualistic task (Vrale & Steen, 2005) becoming a recovery orientated therapeutic experience (Chu, 2016).

**References:**

Chu, S. (2016). Special Observations in the Care of Psychiatric Inpatients: A Review of the Literature and Developments in Practice. *ARC Journal of Psychiatry*, 1, 1, 21-31.

Vrale, G. & Steen, E. (2005). The dynamics between structure and flexibility in constant observation of psychiatric inpatients with suicidal ideation. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 12, 513-518.

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