

# Forensic Mental Health Nursing: Redefine Professionalism

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**Abstract:** *The article clarifies the role of the forensic psychiatric/mental health nurse (FPN) and challenges interchangeable terms confusing forensic and correctional nursing. It addresses the varied venues where the FPN may assess the patient (victim or perpetrator) and gather evidence that may influence conviction, sentencing, recidivism, treatment, and prevention. In depth knowledge of medical and psychiatric nursing as well as the criminal justice system is germane to competent advanced practice forensic nursing. An analogy is drawn between the forensic assessment for risk of violence which is commonly performed by psychiatric nurses in Emergency Departments and the collection and preservation of evidence by medical nurses in Emergency Departments. Both instances require evidence - based techniques and a familiarity with forensic procedures and are often performed by nurses who are not specifically trained in these areas.*

**Keywords:** Forensic, conviction, sentencing, recidivism

## 1. What is Forensic Mental Health Nursing?

Forensic Mental Health Nursing is concerned with the management and treatment of offenders with mental health issues. In addition to assisting police investigations, they may work in hospitals or mental health clinics.

Those patients who encounter the criminal justice system because of their mental health or who become unwell following a criminal offence are dealt with Forensic mental health Nurse

Central to the field of forensic mental health is the assessment and management of risk, in particular, the risk posed to others.

## 2. What kind of nurses and other staff work in Forensic Mental Health?

- Registered Mental Health Nurses (RMNs)
- Forensic Consultant Psychiatrists,
- Occupational Therapists,
- Social Workers,
- Pharmacists,
- Support Workers,
- Activity Coordinators and Nurses.
- There is significant psychological input from both Clinical Psychologists and Assistant Psychologists.
- Psychologists will often undertake assessments of a patients criminal offending behaviour and contribute to the prediction of future risk.

## 3. Workplace settings for Forensic Mental Health Nurses

- Police custody as part of a Police and Liaison service

This will involve assessing people in police cells and making recommendations to the judge regarding possible

diversion into mental health services or to a hospital bed rather than prison

- Most nurses in forensics will work in a secure hospital setting.
- Forensic inpatient units deliver care in differing levels of security from High Secure, Medium Secure and Low Secure units

The level of security a patient is admitted to is based on the assessment of risk they pose, or the criminal offence committed

- Nursing within High Secure Hospitals poses challenges but significant rewards.
- Those admitted to High Secure Hospitals will have committed serious crimes and can continue to be violent.
- The majority of forensic inpatient beds are within Medium Secure Units.

Nurses will be involved in assessing a person's suitability to be admitted and decide on which level of security people should be admitted to.

Patients can be admitted from prisons, general adult wards or other secure wards in either high or low secure units

Forensic mental health units, or "secure hospitals" have a range of facilities to support an individuals' recovery journey.

In comparison to other mental health hospitals, patients in forensic services can stay up to two to three years. Many hospitals have on - sight gyms, gardens and allotments, workshops and cafés run by patients.

The facilities provide opportunities for patients to engage in meaningful activities and undertake occupational work and training. Nurses will work as part of a multidisciplinary team to deliver group activities and 1: 1 work.

#### 4. Area covered by Forensic Mental Health Nurse

Mental health services can be found across the entire criminal justice pathway. Supporting people at the point of

- Arrest in police stations,
- Through custody,
- Within prisons or
- In secure hospitals.

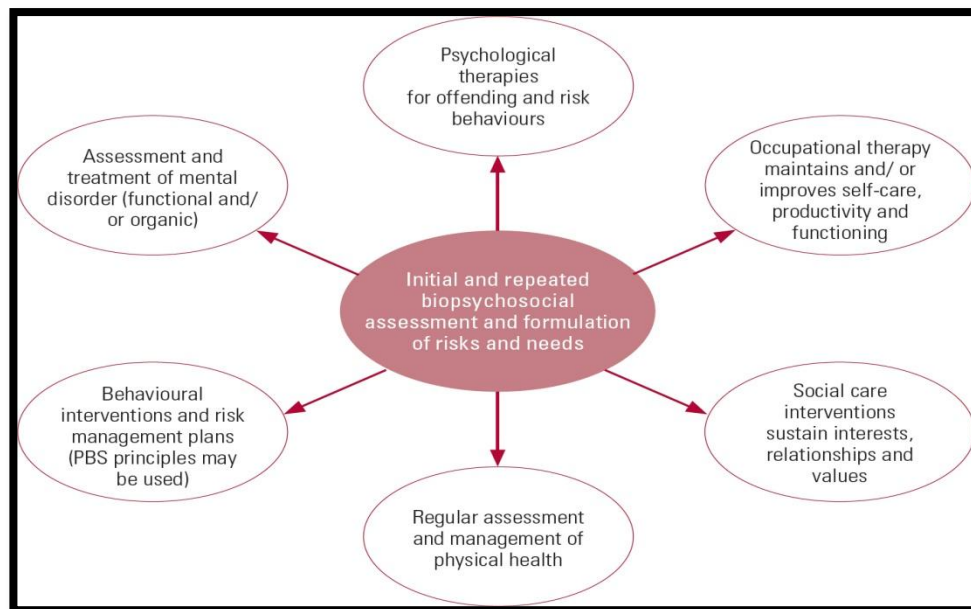
Forensic mental health services also cover law courts, probation services, and community mental health services.

At times, professionals working in forensic psychiatry will be asked to provide expert opinion.

#### 5. What soft skills are useful for a Forensic Mental Health Nurse

- Industry specific knowledge
- Critical thinking
- Good communication skill
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Reliability
- Unbiasness

#### 6. Forensic mental health Nursing services for older people



#### 7. Role of a Forensic Mental Health Nurse

- Observe patient behaviour and report unusual occurrences to a doctor.
- Conduct evaluations of an accused person to determine their mental state during legal proceedings
- Provide emotional support to individuals experiencing an emotional breakdown or lapse in mental health
- Advise authorities on how to treat and interact with an alleged offender appropriately
- Provide a report on a patient's mental state, emotional capacity and history of psychiatric treatment
- Collaborate with the crime scene forensics team to determine the accused person's mental state at the time of the alleged crime

#### 8. Challenges faced by a Forensic mental health Nurse

People admitted to forensic mental health services face double stigmatisation, their mental health issues and the crime they have committed.

Working as a nurse in forensics requires to advocate for patients and continue to deliver safe, effective and high - quality nursing care.

This may require a nurse to challenge public perception or challenge some of their own beliefs.

Professionals working in forensic services are understandably risk adverse and decisions regarding discharge can take a long time.

This can be frustrating at times and requires nurses to engage in reflective practice and clinical supervision to manage feelings of frustrations and maintain therapeutic relationships with patients over a long period of time.

People admitted to secure hospital are detained under the Mental Health Act and are held under sections which are managed by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

This places restrictions and time constraints on an individual's freedom and progress from admission to discharge.

## 9. Rewards for a Forensic mental health nurse

- It is always rewarding to see a person progress through the forensic pathway and out into the community to live an independent life, knowing that the nurse - patient relationship has been central in that journey.
- One of the most rewarding aspects is working with the families and carers of patients.

The period of time leading up to an admission to secure services is often difficult and traumatic for families.

Part of the nursing role is supporting contact with families and working together to support patients.

## 10. Career opportunities for a Forensic mental health nurse

Forensic Mental Health services offer a range of opportunities for RMNs.

- One can work within a hospital setting in the differing levels of security or choose to work inside the prison estate or community.
- Many NHS trusts offer rotational posts for newly qualified nurses, allowing to experience the range of settings and gain valuable experience.
- She will have the opportunity to train in advanced risk assessments and work closely with psychologists to develop risk formulations and plans.
- Due to the length of stay within secure hospitals, nurses have an opportunity to develop therapeutic relationships over a long period of time.
- This allows nurses to see a significant and sustained change which provides meaning to what we do as mental health nurses.

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