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Improving rehabilitation facilities for patients

A trainee member of staff at the Royal United Hospital has used her ingenuity to improve an occupational therapy kitchen, to make it feel more like home for patients and help in their rehabilitation.

The kitchen has a serious role to play in the recovery of patients who may have suffered a stroke, or have dementia.

Jo Vallom, a Trainee Occupational Therapist, says: "Observing a patient making a cup of tea, or going through the process of preparing a meal, helps us to assess such things as dexterity, strength, coordination and range of movement. The outcome of this assessment will indicate that a patient is able to manage by themselves back home, or that they may need additional support.

"Our patients understand that the assessment helps to determine whether they are ready to leave hospital, so it's important to them that they are assessed in a relaxed and comfortable environment. If they feel like they're at home, this is more likely to give us a better picture of their abilities.

"Previously the kitchen didn't feel welcoming and some patients said that they found it a bit too clinical, and it wasn't like home. Also, the limited crockery we did have wasn't really suitable. So I set about making the kitchen more inviting and revamped it for just £20.

"I visited several charity shops and explained what I was hoping to do, and most of them were happy to donate things like mugs, a teapot, or a table cloth. I salvaged a pair of curtains and gave them a new lease of life by shortening and dyeing them. I had started a 'therapeutic' art group for our patients and they were delighted to contribute a range of pictures that have been framed with donated frames, and they are now bringing colour to the room.

"I also approached a company called NRS, who supply a range of mobility products and disability aids, to see if they could help, and they kindly donated some bits and pieces.

"As a student, I had the luxury of being able to dedicate time to the project and there's a lot of excitement about it from both patients and staff. Now our patients tell us that the kitchen feels a bit more like home, which is a great result."

Jo and her fellow Occupational Therapists work with people of all ages who are in hospital and help them carry out the activities that they need, or want to do, in order to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

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Jon Willis, Ward Manager at the RUH, says: "It has been fantastic to see Jo's enthusiasm. Making patients feel comfortable in a strange environment is really important. It enables the occupational therapists to make accurate assessments that will allow the hospital to provide appropriate support for patients on discharge. Jo's initiative has gone a long way to achieving this."

The Occupational Therapists also assess proprioception – which refers to the body's ability to sense movement within joints and joint position, enabling us to know where our limbs are in space without having to look, and stereognosis, which is the ability to recognise an object by touch alone.

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