Handbook of Secure Care
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RCPsych Publications
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Preface

In any society a small proportion of people with mental disorder present with behaviour that transgresses norms and violates the rights of others. Concurrently, the same people are often vulnerable themselves – to violence, to abuse or exploitation by others – or at risk of neglect or self-harm. High rates of mortality are well documented. Long conceptualised as a ‘forensic’ population, they interface between mental health and criminal justice systems, and require containment for a time in secure services to manage risk. In recent years a growing realisation has been that both protection of the public and the personal recovery of these patients must be championed by progressive, specialist clinicians. The label ‘forensic’ is an insufficient descriptor of this group of services which provide care and treatment for mentally disordered offenders, but also for a range of individuals who have not been diverted from the criminal justice system. Many clinicians who work in secure services do not self-identify as ‘forensic’ practitioners. This book provides an overview of the clinical populations, professions, assessment and treatment approaches used in a wide range of specialist secure services. It does so with the intent of providing the broadest possible perspective and so we have opted to title our book the Handbook of Secure Care.

The aim of secure services has shifted over time from primarily containment to active programmes of therapy and rehabilitation within care pathways, which aim for less restrictive placements through levels of security, leading to open and community care and reintegration into wider society. Concurrently, services have grown, with an increase in the past decade in the number of secure mental health beds in many countries. In the 21st century this expanding sector has seen new super-specialisms (i.e. subspecialties) whose more bespoke skills reflect the needs of diverse niche groups. This diversity is expressed across diagnostic boundaries, from mental illness and intellectual disability to autism, brain injury and degenerative disorders. Distinct secure care pathways have evolved for men, women, adolescents and the elderly. Dedicated facilities also now exist for younger adults and the pre-lingually deaf.
Despite their diversity, these services share commonalities. Multi-professional assessment of risk, resilience and need is central, leading into outcome-focused recovery programmes. Secure services now include more psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses and occupational therapists than ever before, but also teachers, pharmacists, dieticians, language therapists and physical exercise technicians, a unique body of expertise bringing secure services into the mainstream, and providing these marginalised patient groups with equal access to the psychological, physical and social interventions they require.

The assurance of quality is a real challenge as secure services have a mixed and turbulent history of achievements and failures over many years. The new era of healthcare governance depends on transparency, and governments should and do demand reporting compliance and convincing evidence of higher standards and better outcomes, as well as controls on cost. The solution to providing more for less can only ever be the sharing of best practice from centres of excellence, together with clinical leadership in a spirit of challenge and ambition for what can be achieved.

Currently no single text within the wider forensic mental health field addresses secure specialist in-patient care. A team of clinicians from St Andrew’s Healthcare, a multi-site hospital group and the largest charitable provider of public healthcare in the UK, has come together to produce this volume with a range of colleagues. As the only non-governmental teaching hospital in the UK, partnered with the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King’s College London and several other leading universities, St Andrew’s teaches a unique range of students across the professions, including postgraduate doctors and PhD students. Among many courses organised wholly or jointly by the charity’s staff are masters modules in specialist care in Northampton and London, from which the idea for this work developed. We believe it represents the cutting edge of specialist secure care, and is intended as a much-needed resource for all students and professionals in the field of forensic care and challenging behaviour.