



Basketmaking was used in occupational therapy from the earliest days. Here, patients are making baskets in their beds at the 5th Northern General Hospital, Leicester, 1920.
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Occupational therapy

Hundreds of thousands of servicemen returned from the First World War with physical and psychological injuries. It was important that they returned to active service or the civilian workforce as soon as possible, and what was to become known as occupational therapy formed a valuable part of their rehabilitation. In occupational therapy graded activities are used to assess disability, to aid recovery from physical or mental illness, and to measure progress.

The therapeutic aspect of making and creativity had long been recognised by physicians and psychiatrists. It was found that the completion of craft-based tasks not only improved physical performance, but also provided considerable emotional and psychological benefit for patients who were often in hospital for prolonged periods. Basketmaking was one of the most frequently taught crafts, and was used in the rehabilitation of servicemen during the war. It is ideal for occupational therapy because it requires coordination between right and left, pattern recognition and problem-solving, and generates many different sensory inputs.

Craft began to fall out of favour in occupational therapy in the 1960s, as rehabilitation moved from the hospital to the community and the focus shifted to activities for daily living. As basketmaking and other crafts declined in importance in wider society, so too did their relevance in rehabilitation and their continued provision became impossible to justify. However, the value of such activities at a purely neurological and emotional level is gaining recognition once more. Basketry is still used today by Combat Stress in treating post-traumatic stress disorder in soldiers.



The worst cases of shellshock were sent to Seale-Hayne Military Hospital in Devon. The pioneering doctor, Arthur Hurst, believed that once the men regained the use of their limbs, they should be engaged in craft activities that employed both hands. Percy Meek, left, had been a basketmaker before the war and taught the other patients after his recovery.
 © The Seale-Haynians.



The Amity Club was founded by Margaret Fulton and Mary Esslemont in 1950 to provide ongoing support for female psychiatric patients after they had left hospital. Basketmaking was one of the activities they undertook at their weekly meetings in Esslemont's dining room.
 © Catherine F. Paterson.



In the summer of 2017, basketmaker Tim Palmer worked with patients at Raigmore Hospital who were recovering from brain injuries. In weekly sessions they made tension trays, square mats and basket bases. The patients and staff both saw the benefits of the sessions, and there was physical and psychological improvement in most cases.
 Courtesy of Tim Palmer.