In Cornwall there are two inpatient mental health units to cover the county, Bodmin Hospital in the east on the county and Longreach House in the west. Longreach House has Cove ward which is a specialist unit for older adults with organic brain disorders. On this ward the multidisciplinary team includes two Occupational therapists and an Assistant practitioner. This group of staff provide in depth assessments of patients cognitive, functional and occupational needs when they are admitted. The occupational therapist are interested in maintaining independence and through doing this offer a range of activity based interventions to make treatments interesting, meaningful to individuals and therefore are able to achieve the best involvement.

Once the Occupational therapists have completed their assessments, they are then able to prescribe interventions which will aim to maintain or improve individual’s functions whilst they are on the ward. These interventions include the use of a group activity programme. The activity programme is planned weekly, and is tailored to patient’s interests and abilities. This enables the activities to be both enjoyable, achievable and still enough of a challenge to maintain skills levels. Other interventions may be one to one which includes trips out off the ward, engaging in sensory integration therapy, individual cooking or other activities which are important to the individual and have been identified as a treatment goal.

The breakfast group is an opportunity for patients to maintain their independence by making their own breakfast, this is also a social event, with patients chatting over cups of tea, whilst discussions about the daily activities on the ward are raised, the patients can choose the radio channel and often listen to the morning news, which helps with orientation and to keep up to date with affairs.

The rest of the morning is focused around maintaining mobility and physical abilities. Patients are given the opportunity to choose what activities they do, and often this impacts upon what is offered each day. Music and movement groups, where ‘upbeat’ or stimulating music is played and activities such as skittles, armchair basketball, bowls, and other ball and balloon based activities are incorporated.

Afternoons are more focused on leisure activities such as gardening, cooking, baking and art. The ward also has a purpose built sensory room. The sensory room on Cove ward is designed to stimulate the primary senses of touch, taste, sight, sound, smell and movement. The essence of a sensory therapy is to allow individuals time, space and the opportunity to enjoy the environment and its sensory components at their own pace, free from unrealistic expectations of others. Older adults who have dementia can continue to benefit from sensory input despite their loss of cognitive functions. The Occupational therapists design individual care plans for the use of the room, which includes each person’s individual preferences and needs. This is known as a sensory diet. A sensory diet involves other activities which specifically meet both the sensory and occupational needs of the person. This could include:

- Hand Massage – using scented cream
- Indian head massage
- Use of music and movement
• Sensory baking
• Games including throwing and catching.
• Fidget objects

Among the benefits of this therapy, is a reduction in stress, agitation and anxiety which can reduce dependency on anxiety medication.

In addition the use of a sensory approach can increase the ability to complete activities of daily living, improve mobility, and improve social skills including the ability to make eye contact. This has a positive impact on well being and quality of life.

This improvement for the person with dementia can make life easier and less distressing for the carer.