

"I am proud that art psychotherapists work with some of the most difficult-to-reach patients in mental health services."

After graduating, Francesca was excited to see that her arts and print making degree could be used to help people with mental health problems and personality disorders.

Francesca La Nave

Art psychotherapist

Employer or university

St George's Healthcare NHS Trust



How I got into the role

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Once I finished my studies and qualified I worked in a rehabilitation unit in Surrey where I gained a lot of experience and established a comprehensive art therapy programme for residents and outpatients. A few years later, I took up a post in a day hospital where I furthered my interest in group therapy eventually training in Group Analytic Psychotherapy, followed by an MA in Group and Intercultural Therapy.

While working at Sutton Hospital and Community Services, I expanded the art psychotherapy service, particularly the group programme. I developed models for group

art therapy which worked well for people with mixed diagnoses including enduring mental health problems and personality disorders. These patients, who found more verbal forms of treatment quite difficult could interact and improve by engaging with image making.

What I do

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After a few years I was offered the post of trustwide training placement coordinator for all the arts therapies. In this role I work with local boroughs and services as well as collaborating with accredited higher education institutions that provide arts therapy training. I also work with, and in some cases provide supervision to colleagues and other NHS staff to build an evidence base for the discipline.

I am now extending my clinical and professional skills through writing, training and coaching in supervision and private practice. I believe in supporting creativity as a life-enhancing path not only in clinical practice but also through helping patients use their imaginations for their personal and collective development.

The best bits and challenges

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I get to work with new trainees which I really enjoy. Helping new art therapists to develop is extremely important and helps to ensure the effectiveness of the service we provide to patients. I am proud that art psychotherapists work with some of the most difficult-to-reach patients in mental health services. It is professionally and emotionally rewarding to witness patients improve and advance in their recovery through art and image making.

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