

Contextual Statement

Collinson, Penny & Herd, Nicola (2020), 'Embodying Health: A review of the work of dance and somatic practitioners working in NHS hospitals.'

There are many examples of dance/movement initiatives and contributions to health and wellbeing in hospital settings, through participation, performance and therapeutic approaches. Rehabilitation and exercise are topics of heightened concern and interest at a time when our bodies are expressing the effects of illness, social distancing, and isolation. The subject of this report is a field review of the work of dance and somatic movement practitioners in NHS hospitals, and is the first such data gathering of its kind in the UK. It collates the views of over 50 dance artists working specifically with somatic-informed movement practice (SIMP) and does not include many other valuable arts practices in hospitals but seeks to focus on this area where there has been little research to date. It aims to be of interest to dance and somatic movement practitioners, students, academics and healthcare professionals involved in arts and health.

The report draws upon evidence from a national survey, and a series of semi-structured interviews with six leading UK practitioners. Its rationale grew out of concerns by practitioners to understand how embodied practice is taking place in hospitals from which informed dialogues with commissioners and healthcare professionals might evolve.

The research inquiry and questions produced responses to four key areas:

1. How do practitioners identify their role in hospitals?
What is their scope of practice? And what is their remit?
2. Where in the UK are practitioners based? On which wards is the work happening?
3. How are practitioners contracted /what is their employment status?
How is the work evaluated and why?
4. In which ways do practitioners find support for their professional work?

Analysis of the data suggests that in order to sustain and develop this work it needs to be nurtured, strategically developed, and have greater visibility. The report finishes with key recommendations for future development in the field which include the documentation, archiving, research and dissemination of practice, and, the need to support practitioners through advocacy, mentorship, and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in related subjects.