

# Aromatherapy for Mental Illness in Prison

## *Aromatherapy for Improving Behavior Among Imprisoned Persons with Mental Illness*

**Agency:** Pennsylvania Department of Corrections  
**Trial Duration:** 09/25/16–01/28/17  
**Pracademic\*:** Paul Aurandt, Unit Manager

### Context

Negative environmental conditions such as unpleasant odors can provoke aggressive behavior. Lavender has been found to minimize stress, anxiety, and insomnia, and may increase prosocial behavior.

### Key Finding

Mentally ill residents in segregated housing were more likely to participate in group activities when exposed to lavender scent. There was no statistical difference in the numbers of misconducts.

\*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy "pracademics" who lead trials.

### Background

Persons in custody with serious mental illness can exhibit chronic problematic behavior. Aromatherapy has been found effective in reducing anxiety and encouraging more positive behavior. Pennsylvania's State Correctional Institution at Pittsburgh tested lavender aromatherapy in its Secure Residential Treatment Unit (SRTU).

### Trial Design

This trial consisted of two 9-week phases: baseline (09/25/16–11/26/16) and intervention (11/27/16–01/28/17). A total of 32 residents were enrolled. Lavender was infused into two SRTU wings.

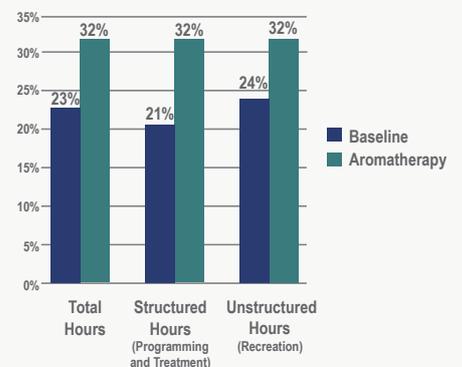
### Results and Implications

Social interaction was measured as participation in out-of-cell (OOC) time for programming and recreational activities. On average, trial participants had 39% more OOC time during the intervention period ( $p=0.09$ ). No difference was found in the number of misconducts received during the two study phases; there were 10 mis-

conducts (9 non-assaultive, 1 assaultive) in the baseline phase, and 12 misconducts (11 non-assaultive, 1 assaultive) during the intervention phase.

This trial suggests that aromatherapy may increase self-efficacy and sociability. However, the study design cannot preclude other factors, including time, criminal records, and mental health histories. The trial should be conducted with a randomized controlled trial design.

### Acceptance of Offered Out-Of-Cell Time



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