



Animal Assisted Therapy

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PICO Question

Among RN and patient populations, does the use of pet therapy improve RN satisfaction and speed patient recovery after illness/surgery?

Background

- "A small animal is often an excellent companion for the sick, for long chronic cases especially" (Florence Nightengale, 1859)
- Animal Assisted Therapy and Activities Standards of Practice define, AAT, commonly known as pet therapy, as "providing therapeutic opportunities to enhance quality of life. AAT are delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained handlers with animals that meet specific criteria"
- The first recorded use of animal therapy dates back to 1792 when animals were incorporated into the treatment for mental patients at the York Retreat, England, as part of an enlightened approach attempting to reduce the use of harsh dogs and restraints.
- Many pet owners agree that from playing, to grooming, to walking, to snuggling, there are various ways to find pleasure, unconditional love and companionship from a pet.
- In fact, a national survey revealed that 57% of respondents would choose to being stranded with a pet versus another family member.



Database search/ Key words

Relevant databases such as CINAHL and MEDLINE were used to gather evidence

Key words:

- animal assisted therapy
- inpatient
- patient focused
- "effect on nursing staff" and "staff attitude toward"

Advanced search techniques:

- research articles published from 2007 to 2012

Six articles were chosen; four centering on a different inpatient population relative to the researchers question and two research studies

Literature Review

Johnson and colleagues (2008)

- Qualitative study in which 30 newly diagnosed cancer patients were chosen
- Three therapies included dog visits, friendly human visits and a reading group
- They spent 15 minutes, three times a week for four weeks in their respective therapies
- The results showed positive results from all three therapies and all were recommended for other patients
- It was suggested that a larger sample might produce more significant changes and allow for better generalization.
- They also suggested a decline in patient's health may have affected the results

Cole and colleagues (2007)

- Quantitative study –looked at both physiological and psychological data
- Study involved hospitalized patients with a diagnosis of heart failure
- The goal was to determine if AAT could reduce stress in patients with advanced heart failure (Cole, Gawlinski, Steers, & Kotlerman, 2007, p. 577).
- Patients visited by a volunteer with a therapy dog versus usual care or volunteer only visits had lower cardiopulmonary pressures, neurohormone levels, and anxiety levels
- Decreased plasma levels of epinephrine and norepinephrine during and after the intervention were significantly greater in the volunteer-dog group than in the volunteer only group
- Activation of the neurohormonal cascade in patients with heart failure is very detrimental to their prognosis as it increases heart rate and blood pressure making the already compromised heart work harder

Lust and associates (2007)

- Quantitative convenience study using 58 patients in an inpatient rehabilitation
- Study questioned whether or not AAT could reduce the amount of psychoactive, analgesic, and laxative medications required by the participants
- Data was acquired three months prior related to use of as needed medications, and again for nine months after dog placement in the facility

Literature Review (cont'd)

Lust & Assoc (cont'd)

- Significant changes were noted in the use of as needed analgesics post intervention
- Quality of life factors that contribute to one's self worth were positively affected by the introduction of the dog into the living environment

Colombo, Dello Buono, Smania, Raviola, and De Leo (2006)

- Sample of 144 cognitively intact elderly nursing home residents was separated into three groups; the first group was given a plant, the second were given nothing (control group) and the third a canary
- Study was conducted over a three-month period
- results showed no significant changes in both the plant and control groups
- The animal group showed significant improvement in quality of life and psychopathological symptoms

Moody, W. J., Maps, R. K., & O'Rourke, S. (2002)

- Two cross-sectional surveys of staff prior to and after the pet visitation program was introduced
- Results of the study revealed that before the AAT program was implemented, staff had high expectations of the program
- Following the program's implementation, these expectations were realized and staff seemed to be more positive about the program than they initially anticipated

Rossetti, DeFabiis, and Belpedio (2008)

- Qualitative study was done through 30-minute interviews of a convenience sample of 10 nurses and counselors who participated in AAT for the prior three months
- Results were that the respondents felt self-awareness and morale increased and the use of the animal-assisted therapy was seen as "innovative" and "therapeutic".
- Challenges found included, the amount of preparation needed for the dogs, the amount of time increased when doing rounds and potential patient's fears or allergies

Implications

- Research has shown AAT helps improve patient outcomes by buffering stress
- Research has also shown that animal assisted therapy can affect physiological parameters of the patient in a positive way
- Clinically relevant decrease in the PAP could lead to a decrease in the administration of medications to control blood pressure on hospitalized heart failure patients which contributes to the decrease in polypharmacy and patient cost
- A statistically significant decrease in the usage of as needed analgesia in rehab patients visited by a therapy dog
- A positive effect on patients happiness, self-worth, and outlook
- Overall, animal assisted therapy seems to be a relatively uplifting experience for patients that have proven in some cases to impact physiological parameters of health positively
- Some evidence that staff nurses feel AAT has a positive impact on them as well as the patients

Conclusion

As more hospital administrations begin to see the value in holistic care including AAT, more in depth research studies will need to be conducted to validate physical as well as psychological benefits of therapy. In addition, with the emergence of magnet institutions and the focus on healthy work environment, a further study on the effect of AAT on staff nurses is also warranted. AAT seems to be a relatively low cost, easily implemented program for staff to participate in as the animal can be brought to them negating the need for them to find coverage and leave the unit to visit the animal elsewhere.

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