



Significance Statement

How does the use of animal-assisted therapy compared to the lack of animal-assisted therapy affect the psychological well being of all patients?

P- Patients in the acute care setting and elderly institutions

I- Animal-assisted therapy

C- No Animal-assisted therapy

O- Psychological well-being

Key Methodology

- A randomized controlled trial that studied the effectiveness of AAT on elderly patients in a long-term care facility, using several different scales that measure factors that influence psychological well-being. ¹
- A non-randomized control trial that assessed the efficacy of AAT on elderly patients with Alzheimer's disease on mood and cognition in an Italy daycare setting. ⁴
- A quasi-experimental study was conducted to assess the difference between a child's anxiety level who received a brief pet therapy intervention compared to a child who completed a jigsaw puzzle with a research assistant. ³
- A quasi-experimental study was performed to assess the effects of AAT dog program on patients with a variety of health ailments. ²

Key Findings

- Research supports the use of canines as the most beneficial in Animal-Assisted therapy although a variety of animals may be used. ³
- There was a 33.5% decrease in the Geriatric Depression Scale scores for those who underwent AAT, while the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule and the Numeric Pain Rating Scale showed a slight decrease as well. ¹
- There was an improvement in mood and depression scores on the Geriatric Depression Scale and a slight improvement in cognitive function as measured by the Mini Mental State Exam. ⁴
- Children in the pet therapy group experienced a significantly greater decrease in anxiety ($p = .004$). ³
- Post intervention state anxiety scores were significantly lower in pet therapy than the puzzle group. Patients who did have a dog at home related to patients who did not have a dog at home responded similarly. ³
- After 15 minutes of AAT dog visits, heart rate, respiratory rate and anxiety levels decreased. A reduction in heart and respiratory rates ($p < .01$) and level of anxiety ($p < .000$) with improved levels of comfort and well-being ($p < .000$). ²

Recommended Key Practices

- Handlers should be present at all times ¹
- Educate on AAT and questions before therapy: such as fear of animal, preference in AAT ¹
- Provide at least 15 minutes sessions in conjunction with medical therapy ²
- Consider contradictions: allergies, isolation, medical diagnosis ⁴
- Follow up with patients on the effectiveness ³
- Ensure consistency (at least once a week) but not dependency on AAT ¹



References

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Figure List

Figure 1. Chapman, J (n.d.). Animal Assisted Therapy [Online Image]. Retrieved November 1, 2021 from <https://happydoginstitute.com/animal-assisted-therapy/>. Copyright 2017 by Jen Chapman.