



## PICO Question

In oncology patients, how does animal-assisted therapy affect their mental health compared to no animal intervention, in conjunction with other treatments?

## Key Methodology

- This study utilized a quasi-experimental design to assess the psychological status of oncology patients and the impact of animal-assisted therapy on both patients and staff in an inpatient surgical oncology unit.<sup>2</sup>
- In children undergoing outpatient oncological treatment, the effectiveness of implementing animal-assisted therapy was demonstrated through a quantitative, quasi-experimental design.<sup>4</sup>
- A phenomenological design was employed to examine the relationship between patients with an advanced cancer diagnosis and companion animals.<sup>3</sup>
- In this qualitative, cross-sectional study, the focus was on exploring the appreciation and perception of animal-assisted intervention among pediatric cancer patients and their caregivers.<sup>1</sup>

## Key Findings

- After engaging in animal-assisted therapy (AAT), children demonstrated improvements in pain levels, irritability, and stress, highlighting the positive impact of AAT on their well-being.<sup>4</sup>
- Participating in animal-assisted therapy groups resulted in notable enhancements in quality-of-life indicators for the patients involved.<sup>2</sup>
- Companion animals play a vital role in countering the impact of cancer by promoting personal growth, facilitating emotional expression, and encouraging daily engagement.<sup>3</sup>
- Animal-assisted interventions (AAls) have been shown to improve the well-being of children with cancer and their families who undergo physical and emotional challenges.<sup>1</sup>

## Recommended Key Practices

- Animal-assisted therapy should be implemented in the treatment plan of oncology patients in both the inpatient and outpatient settings as it relieves anxiety and improves patient outcomes.<sup>1-4</sup>
- Prior to initiating the intervention, evaluate the medical and behavioral conditions of both the patient and the animal.
- To maintain standard infection precautions during animal-assisted sessions, ensure proper grooming of the animal beforehand, practice hand hygiene for both the handler and participants, and disinfect the animal's paws before and after each session.<sup>4</sup>

## References

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Figures

Figure 1: Leukemia patient with therapy dog [personal photo].



Figure 1.