

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

Utilizing Animal Assisted Therapy to Sponsor Support and Morale for Night Shift Workers

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Purpose: Stress is a common cited factor associated with job retention with many nurses willing to leave the profession due to workplace stress.¹⁻³ In addition, nurses may have an increased risk for diseases such as obesity, anxiety, and depression⁴⁻⁶. The health of nurses is especially concerning for those working non-standard hours. Many night shift workers have stated they have more fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and declining health than their day shift counterparts. Also, many working night shift do not feel support from hospital administration and nurse leaders and even have remarked a lack of fairness in the workplace associated with performance evaluations⁷. With close to 25% of healthcare workers working non-standard hours⁷, organizations are in a position to create meaningful and cost effective healthy work environments for their staff to increase morale, health, and support. Animal assisted therapy has the potential to benefit employees in a healthcare setting by providing a sense of belonging and encouragement to the employees.

Methods: A pilot study took place in both inpatient and outpatient healthcare settings focusing on animal assisted therapy for staff. Both day and night shift visits by a canine-handler team consisting of a three-year old golden-doodle and a handler with over nine-years experience in animal assisted therapy occurred at scheduled times over a six-week time-frame.

Results: Night shift workers were especially eager to visit with the team, even stating how much they felt supported and included as members of the unit by having the canine-handler team visit on nights.

Conclusion: It is imperative that nursing leaders intentionally create and sustain work environments that promote wellness for all healthcare workers. The results of this study and observations of the staff during the canine-handler team encounters during this pilot revealed that animal assisted therapy can be a cost effective support program, especially for staff working non-standard hours.

Title:

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Keywords:

Night shift nurses, animal assisted therapy and nurse leader

Abstract Summary:

With close to 25% of healthcare workers working non-standard hours, organizations are in a position to create meaningful healthy work environments for their staff to increase

morale, health, and support. Animal assisted therapy has the potential to benefit employees in a healthcare setting by providing a sense of belonging.

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Author Summary: Dr. Morgan Yordy is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at Auburn University. Her primary teaching role is within the undergraduate Baccalaureate program of study. Dr. Yordy's research interests include Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), student success, health promotion initiatives, health disparities, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Prior to her position as an assistant professor, she worked in staff development as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in the hospital setting.