Animal Assisted Therapy Effects on Quality of Life

Introduction

- Why is this a problem?
  - 20% difference in self-reported depression between elders in retirement homes and the community.
  - 33% of residents living in retirement homes experience social isolation.

- Why is Animal Assisted Therapy important?
  - Adjunct therapy that is non-pharmacological.
  - Improved communication in nursing homes when dogs are present.

PICO Question

- P: Adult patients
- I: Animal assisted therapy
- C: No intervention
- O: Increase in quality of life


- Purpose: To determine whether animal-assisted therapy is an effective tool in decreasing loneliness of elders in long-term care facilities.
- Sample: 45 volunteer residents from 3 long-term care facilities from southern Michigan randomized into 3 groups.
- Duration: 6 weeks.
- Design/Level: Randomized control trial, Level II, pretest and posttest design.
- Dependent Variable: Loneliness, posttest scores.
- Measurement: Version 3 of the University of California at Los Angeles Loneliness Scale.
- Findings: Animal assisted therapy, even one session of 30 minutes per week, was effective in reducing loneliness in a statistically significant manner (p=.001).
- Limitations: Small sample size, short duration and no follow-up, no baseline scores or demographics to compare the 3 groups, did not control for some animal assisted therapy encounter in control group.


- Purpose: To identify the extent to which animal assisted therapy affects mood, self-perceived health, and sense of coherence among cancer patients.
- Sample: 28 Caucasians, 2 African Americans.
- Duration: 4 week period.
- Design: Randomized control trial, Level II, pretest and posttest design.
- Independent Variable: Animal assisted therapy, friendly human visit, and quiet reading group.
- Dependent Variable: Mood, fatigue, self-perceived health, and sense of coherence.
- Measurement: Profile of Mood States, Self-perceived health questionnaire, Orientation to Life questionnaire, and Esol questionnaire.
- Findings: No statistical differences within or between groups.
- Limitations: Disease progression during the time of intervention, radiation therapy can cause adverse effects for patients, discussion between groups, short duration, small sample size, limited ethnic diversity.


- Purpose: To test patient mood before and after animal assisted therapy in a hospital setting to see if animal-assisted therapy affects patient quality of life.
- Sample: 20 voluntary participants (hospitalized from July 2006-July 2008).
- Duration: 30 minute sessions once a month.
- Design: Quasi-experimental, Level III, group pretest and posttest design.
- Independent Variable: Animal assisted therapy (dogs, cats, rabbits).
- Dependent Variable: Changes in mood.
- Measurement: Profile of Mood States.
- Findings: There was an increase in mood after animal assisted therapy.
- Limitations: Very small sample size, no control group, random selection, or power analysis; did not assess health effects of allowing animals in the hospital.


- Purpose: To measure the effects of animal-assisted therapy.
- Sample: 218 hospitalized psychiatric patients, mean age 39.9 years.
- Duration: 2 years.
- Design: Quasi Experimental, Level III.
- Independent Variable: Animal assisted therapy (cows, horses).
- Dependent Variable: Patients’ anxiety, depression, blood pressure, and pain levels.
- Measurement: Standard hospital 0-10 point pain scale, depression and anxiety scales developed by David Burns, MD.
- Findings: Some significant improvement on psychological as well as physiological measures, those who attended animal assisted therapy showed a decrease in overall anxiety, depression, BP, and pain.
- Limitations: Varying psychiatric disorders/diagnoses, animal assisted therapy and stress management sessions held in the same room at the same time.

References


For Practice:

- Safety and infection control
- Patients should be asked about known allergies
- Area must be cleaned of animal dander after therapies
- Area should be a smooth and hard surface
- Animals
- Up to date on vaccinations
- Certified as therapy animals
- Trained staff member to monitor therapy sessions

For Future Research:

- Research focused on specific populations:
  - Dementia patients
  - Long-term care patients
  - Impaired palliative care patients
- Limit animals used in study to certified dogs and cats
- Length of studies need to be longer:
  - One year or more
  - Follow-up questionnaire assessing the patient’s quality of life

For Care:

- Patients and their families
-床 should be smooth and hard surface
- No minimum sample size power analysis
- Limitations:
  - Variety of animals used for animal-assisted therapy
  - Different target populations
  - Large variation in duration and sample sizes
  - Compares: Intensity, frequency, and duration of intervention (standard therapy vs no therapy)
  - Different measurement tools for quality of life
  - Patient preferences
  - Demographics

For Future Studies:

- Not enough studies to be understood
- Length of studies need to be longer
- One year or more
- Follow-up questionnaire assessing the patient’s quality of life