

Animal-Assisted Therapy: Role of Animals as a Therapeutic

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Abstract

Animal assisted therapy is a role in which animal is getting the healing tool to assist a person. A therapist who takes along a pet may be reckoned as being less threatening, increasing the rapport between patient and therapist. Therapy involving animals was first employed in therapy by doctors. AAT is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that matches specific criteria is an inbuilt component of the discussion procedure. Animals can be incorporated into a variety of programs. People with a different of disorders can benefit from animal-assisted therapy, including: autism spectrum disorders, addiction

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INTRODUCTION

Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is the role of animals as a healing tool to aid a person in restoring equilibrium to their lifespan. The goal of AAT is to improve a patient's social, emotional, or cognitive functioning, proponent's state that animals can be useful for educational and motivational effectiveness for participants. A therapist who takes along a pet may be reckoned as being less threatening, increasing the rapport between patient and therapist. Animals used in therapy include domesticated pets, farm animals and marine mammals (such as dolphins).

Wilson's (1984) Biophilia hypothesis suggests that, if we take in animals at rest or in a peaceful state, this may signal to us safety, security and feelings of well-being which in turn may activate a nation, where personal change and healing are possible. Therapy involving animals was first employed in therapy by doctors. Boris Levinson, who accidentally found out the role of pet therapy with kids, when he allowed his dog alone with a difficult child, and upon returning, found the child was speaking to the dog. The US military promoted the role of heels as a therapeutic intervention with psychiatric patients in 1919 at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC.

WHAT IS ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY?

"AAT is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that matches specific criteria is an inbuilt component of the discussion procedure. AAT is directed and/or redeemed by a health/human service professional with specialized expertise, and within the scope of practice of his/her profession. AAT is designed to encourage improvement in human physical, societal, emotional, and/or cognitive performance. AAT is provided in a variety of backgrounds and may be a group or soul in nature. This process is documented and evaluated" (From Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Activities and Therapy).

GOAL OF AAT PROGRAM

Animals can be incorporated into a variety of programs. If you become involved in an AAT program, ask the treatment provider to explain the person's goals to you. The following are some examples of AAT goals:

Physical:

- Improve fine motor skills, wheelchair skills and standing balance.

Mental Health:

- Increase verbal interactions between group members, attention skills (i.e., Paying attention, staying on task) and self-esteem.

- Develop leisure/recreation skills.
- Reduce anxiety and loneliness.

Educational:

- Aid in long- or short-term memory.
- Improve vocabulary and knowledge of concepts such as size, color etc.

Motivational:

- Improve willingness to be involved in a group activity.
- Improve interactions with staff and others.

WHAT CONDITIONS/DISORDERS DOES ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY TREAT?

People with a different of disorders can benefit from animal-assisted therapy, including: autism spectrum disorders, addiction, cancer, heart disease, dementia, developmental disorders, psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, emotional and behavioural disorders, chronic pain [1].



Fig. 1: Dog Therapy

TYPES OF AAT

There are many types of AAT ranging from the use of dogs, two caterpillars, even to little animals such as fish and hamsters. The most popular forms of AAT include canine therapy, cat therapy, dolphin therapy and equine therapy.

Dog Therapy

Therapy dog gives affection and are very friendly to people in hospitals, retirement houses, nursing homes and to people with learning difficulties. Therapy dogs are usually not assistance or service dogs, but can be one or both with some systems (fig.1). Research suggests that interaction with therapy dogs can temporarily move the expiration of various neurotransmitters in the brain; levels of oxytocin (linked to bonding) and dopamine (involved in the reward-motivation system) are increased, while cortisol levels (an immunosuppressant associated with stress) are diminished. One example of the use of therapy dogs is the building of self-confidence.

Cat Therapy

A therapy cat is a cat trained to help the clients and develop the human-animal interaction. Likewise the therapy dog, a therapy cat also provides love and affection to people in retirement homes, nursing homes, schools and in many other places (fig.2). The most significant characteristic of a therapy cat is its disposition. A good therapy cat must be friendly, patient, confident, gentle, and at ease in all positions. Therapy cats must enjoy human contact and be content to be petted and treated, sometimes clumsily [2].



Fig. 2: Cat Therapy

Dolphin Therapy

Dolphin assisted therapy involves the practice of swimming with dolphins (Fig.4). Dolphin assisted therapy's agenda is supposed to facilitate people with autism, down syndrome, and cerebral palsy with rehabilitation in motor function, voice communication and language as well as try and maintain and increase the client's attention span as well.

Equine Therapy (Hippotherapy)

A distinction exists between hippotherapy and therapeutic horseback riding. The American Hippotherapy Association defines hippotherapy as a physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy treatment strategy that utilizes equine movement as part of an integrated intervention program to achieve functional outcomes (Fig.3). Therapeutic riding for people is done for physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and behavioural problems". In addition, equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) uses horses to work with persons who have mental health issues. EAP does not involve riding more often [3].



Fig. 3: Hippotherapy

STAGES OF THERAPY

The steps in animal-assisted therapy includes the three stages for physical and psychological health improvement and are as under:

Stage 1: Patient goes to session with therapist without animals present to assess therapy needs. The next session the animal is introduced to the client and interactions between the animal and client begin.

Stage 2: Motor skill is developed by developing a bond between the animal and client. Examples include feeding the animal treats or grooming. Then verbal commands like stay and sit is used to develop the verbal communication. Animals are used as motivational factor for the client by the therapy. Motor functions of the clients are improved by fetching food and water to the animals [4].

Point 3: Therapist monitors improvement with animal-human interaction and judges' positive social situation. Patients are then given independency to make choices for the animal assisted therapy partner.

BENEFITS OF AAT

Some of the benefits of animal-assisted therapy include:

- Improved fine motor skills and balance.
- Increased focus, attention and greater self-control.
- Increased self-esteem and ability to care for oneself.
- Reduced anxiety, overall physical pain, grief and isolation.



Fig. 4: Dolphin Therapy

- Reduced blood pressure, depression, risk of heart attack or stroke and need for medication.
- Improved willingness to be involved in a therapeutic program or group activity.
- Increased trust, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving skills and social skills.
- Releases many hormones such as Phenyl ethylamine.
- Creates motivation for the client to recover faster.

CONCLUSION

Animal-Assisted therapy is mainly beneficial for people who are resistant to treatment or have difficulty in retrieving their emotions or expressing themselves in talk therapy. AAT has helped to reduce among individuals.

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