Animal Assisted Interactions in a Healthcare Setting:

Literature Review

Sydney Hentush

Lakeview College of Nursing

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"Pet therapy is a broad term that includes animal-assisted therapy and other animal-assisted activities…that uses dogs or other animals to help people recover from or better cope with health problems" (Mayo Clinic, 2019, para. 1). Pet therapy, also known as animal assisted interaction (AAI), is becoming a popular topic. In recent years, many hospitals, and other healthcare facilities, have begun to incorporate animal assisted interaction programs. There are multiple research studies that show promising evidence in allowing animals to be incorporated into patient care. Hospitals who do have animal assisted interactions programs "desire more therapy dog volunteers so that the units, and therefore patients, may receive even more regular visits" (McCullough, Ruehrdanx, & Jenkins, 2016, p. 2). While there is a large amount of promising evidence in favor of allowing animal assisted interaction programs; it is important to understand the risks and benefits in allowing these programs in healthcare setting

Animal-assisted therapy at a University Centre for Palliative Medicine – a qualitative content analysis of patient records

The article focuses on the use of therapy dogs in a hospital setting. It provides background information on animal assisted interaction programs. This background information includes; how animal handlers become certified and examples of how dogs can be incorporated into patient care. The study was conducted over a year. The study had fifty-two patient participants that had one or more animal assisted interactions. The fifty-two patients were all patients suffering from some form of a progressive terminal disease (Schmitz, Beermann, MacKenzie, Fetz, & Schulz-Quach, 2017). Data collected for the study included; patient emotions during and after the therapy session, observer perception, therapeutic communication and the effect the animal left on the patient immediately following the therapy session. "The most frequently symptoms mentioned were exhaustion/fatigue, followed by pain and dyspnea…

but all patients wished to continue their respective animal assisted therapy sessions" (Schmitz, Beermann, MacKenzie, Fetz, & Schulz-Quach, 2017, p.4). There were repeating themes seen as the data was analyzed. These themes included; pleasure being the most noted emotion from patients during therapy sessions, sadness being the emotion the dog handlers observed the most from those present, an increase in communication while the dogs were with the patients, and the patient reminiscing on their own life experiences with animals immediately following the therapy session (Schmitz, Beermann, MacKenzie, Fetz, & Schulz-Quach, 2017).

Key Points

The article did a good job of breaking down the study. One of the key points the article focused on was patient and animal associated therapy characteristics. In the patient characteristics the fifty-two patients were broken down further by gender, the form of terminal disease with oncological or non-oncological, and the number of patients who have a history of animal ownership (Schmitz, Beermann, MacKenzie, Fetz, & Schulz-Quach, 2017). The animal associated therapy characteristics broke down the details of the therapy sessions. This included how many patients received one or more visits from the therapy animals. This information is important to know because not all of the patient participants wanted to receive another therapy session. Another key point within the article is the explanation of what occurred during these therapy sessions. The goals of the therapy sessions were "achieved by means of touching, patting, or stroking the therapy dog or having it lie on the patient bed beside the patient" (Schmitz, Beermann, MacKenzie, Fetz, & Schulz-Quach, 2017, p. 12). The last key point of the article includes limitations to the study. The limitations to this particular study include the small amount of participants.

Assumptions

This article advocates for more healthcare facilities to include more animal assisted therapy programs. It limits many of the benefits to having such programs available to patients. While there were a few negative responses, the majority of those involved had positive benefits. Animal assisted therapy sessions brought the patient and the patient's family happiness. It also encouraged more communication between the patient, the dogs' handler, and the patient's family.

Deficit/Conclusion

The inclusion of animal assisted therapy programs in hospitals can benefit patients on a variety of levels. This article is a good advocate for why these programs should be included. However, this study was conducted on a small scale over a year. Also, there are not many studies that evaluate the response to these programs. The conduction of more studies with these ideas in mind can help better determine how successful animal associated therapy can be to patients.

References

Schmitz, A., Beermann, M., MacKenzie, C., Fetz, K., & Schulz-Quach, C. (2017). Animal-assisted therapy at a University Centre for Palliative Medicine – a qualitative content analysis of patient records. *BMC Palliative Care*, 16(50), 1-13. Retrieved September 5, 2019, from https://web-a-ebscohost-com.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/ pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=893a46bd-5698-4155-bea7-04cdf3d6053a%40sessionmgr4008