ANIMAL ASSISTED ACTIVITY IN THE HOSPITAL SETTING
~ITS IMPACT ON THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE~

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Stephen with his new puppy “Honey”.

1986 - 1990
P ET PALS – THE EARLY YEARS

Alyson Schnatz and the Pet Pals in the early years of the program. Notice the t-shirts!
ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY

- Definitions
- History
- Research
- Conclusions
Definitions

- **Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)**, also known as “pet therapy”, utilizes trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients.

- According to Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society), AAT is a goal directed intervention delivered by a health or human services professional for a specific patient. Whereas **Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA)** is a casual meet and greet type visitation program which can be reproduced over and over.
ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY

- There are specified goals and objectives for each individual.
- Progress is measured and documented in the medical record.
Animal-Assisted Activities are basically the casual "meet and greet" activities that involve pets visiting people. The same activity can be repeated with many people, unlike a therapy program that is tailored to a particular person or medical condition.
In the 19th century in Gheel, Belgium farm animals were included in therapy for people with disabilities so they could learn to care for farm animals for their daily living. (Christiansen, 2007)

In 1792 at the York Retreat in England birds and rabbits were included as part of the therapy program for those with mental illness.

Florence Nightingale recognized that animals provided a level of social support in the institutional care of the mentally ill. She also noted in her nursing notes “a small pet animal” was an “excellent companion for the sick.” She also stated that “A pet bird in a cage is sometimes the only pleasure of an invalid confined for many years to the same room.”
In 1867 in Germany animals were used in the treatment of patients with epilepsy.
In 1919 the Secretary of the Interior suggested that psychiatric patients at St. Elizabeth’s hospital in Washington, DC use dogs for therapy.
In the 1940’s the Pawling Air Force Convalescent Hospital in New York encouraged veterans to work with animals at the center’s farm and in 1942 they introduced a planned program involving dogs. (Christiansen, 2007)
In the 1960’s Boris Levinson, a child psychologist, discovered that communications with a nonverbal child improved when his dog was present during sessions.

In 1964 Levinson coined the term pet therapy and his work is considered the birth of animal assisted therapy. He wrote extensively on the subject and inspired much of the initial research. (Christiansen, 2007)
In general, research has shown there are many positive effects of a dog or other animal companion on the elderly and the ill:

- Animals help decrease isolation and loneliness.
- Elderly people with an animal companion tend to go to the doctor less.
- Cholesterol levels are lowered in people who have the love of a dog or cat in their lives.
- Pets can help to alleviate everyday stress.
- Blood pressure is reduced after interacting with a pet.
- Pets naturally know how to make us laugh.
- Dogs need to exercise and this in turn helps people stay fit.
- Pets can help satisfy our need for touch, affection and warmth.
- Animals provide the elderly and the ill with hope.
Research in this field has only taken place in the last 30 or so years.

Research in the medical setting during the past decade has shown that pet therapy has benefits to patients in intensive care settings, pediatrics, with spinal cord injuries and the elderly. (Cole & Gawlinski, 2000)

Patients report feeling happy, more calm and less lonely after a pet visit. (Cole & Gawlinski, 1995)

Patients experience a decrease in anxiety, systolic pulmonary artery pressure, epinephrine and nor epinephrine levels. Cole, Gawlinski, Steers & Kotlerman, 2007)

Recent studies have indicated that interacting with animals can increase a patient’s level of the hormone oxytocin.

A study in pediatrics found that pet therapy distracts children from pain perception and may possibly activate comforting thoughts regarding companionship and home. (Sobo, Eng, Kassity-Krich, 2006)
A study with heart attack patients showed those who owned pets lived longer than those who didn’t. (Cole, Gawlinski, Steers & Kotlerman, 2007)

A study in 2009 found that patients had significant decreases in pain, respiratory rate and negative mood state and a significant increase in perceived energy level. Quantitative and qualitative findings provide support for decreased tension/anxiety and fatigue/inertia and improved overall mood. A study of patients hospitalized with heart failure showed that animal-assisted therapy improved cardiopulmonary pressures, neurohormone levels and anxiety.

Patients on general care units reported feeling happy, comforted, satisfied, relaxed, attached and peaceful after a dog visit.
In 2010, American Humane Association, Pfizer Animal Health, the Pfizer Foundation and Zoetis partnered to conduct a unique study on the impact of animal assisted therapy on children with cancer and their families at 5 sites across the country.

- Mary Jo Gilmer (Vanderbilt University School of Nursing) stated “Many studies have anecdotally documented the benefits of animal-assisted therapy. We all want to think that pet therapy helps, but we need the evidence to back that up, to see if it is a sound treatment option for patients and their families.”
Healthcare facilities adopting the practice of pet therapy should have policies which address infectious disease control and zoonoses, human allergies, phobias and physical harm, animal well-being, therapy animal selection, handler role, participant inclusion and service delivery protocol. ((Mariani, Fluke, 2010)

Anecdotal evidence is plentiful from programs that have never had any situations of zoonotic infections or diseases.
CONCLUSIONS

- Therapy animals in the hospital have the potential of:
  - normalizing the hospital experience
  - motivating active participation in the healing process
  - offering helpful distraction from pain or worry
  - decreasing blood pressure and heart rate
  - alleviating distress
  - increasing opportunities for sensory stimulation and physical touch
  - decreasing depressive symptoms by offering joy, company, and something to look forward to.
CONCLUSIONS

- Patients generally rates nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers high on patient satisfaction surveys but often rate the overall experience of hospitalization low. (2008 Hospital Pulse Report)

- Complementary and alternative therapies, including pet therapy, are among the domains directed toward creating a healing environment. (Johnson, Meadows, Haubner & Sevedge, 2003)

- Pet therapy is a low-tech, low-cost therapy that improved mood and was meaningful to hospitalized patients. (Coakley, Mahoney, 2010)
IMPACT OF AN ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITY PROGRAM

Who Benefits?

The patients
The families
The staff
The Animal Assisted Activity Program at University Hospitals Health System, Northeast Ohio

Pet Pals is a community partner with Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and the Cuyahoga County Public Library System.
The Pet Pals program is SSSOOOOOOO important. I’ve seen patients and colleagues just melt, smile and actually cry when they encounter them. Such important clinicians they are!!

Thank you for your work with them.

Truly,

Kevin S. Charnas
Clinical Research Specialist II
University Hospitals
Harrington Heart & Vascular Institute
Heart Failure Center
In 2013 the nearly 100 owner/dog teams (and one pony!) made over 160,000 visits to patients, families, visitors and staff members throughout UH.
PETIE THE PONY
THANK YOU!