

Obtaining Animal Assisted Therapy for Geriatric Psychiatry Patients

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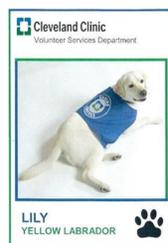
Civic Education Applied Medicine Internship Program

Hypothesis

- Certified animals for animal assisted therapy are hard to come across especially for dementia care units
- Some people are not able to get their pets certified
- Certification is also costly for people who would otherwise be willing to volunteer
- Elderly psychiatric patients greatly benefit from social interaction
- Strict schedules and set group therapy times help with those diagnosed with dementia and memory loss
- If every behavioral health unit had an trained animal for therapy, healing and comfort would be far increased
 - Especially for those patients that have lived with pets previously or currently have them

Methodology

- A literature review was conducted through usage of electronic databases such as CINAHL, PubMed, and other various psychiatry databases along with the DSM-5 manual in the English language using articles from the current century, early 2000s and onward.
- Articles that were used focused on geriatric psychiatry patients, especially those with mental disorders usually associated with memory loss such as dementia and Alzheimer's.
- Additionally, the Cleveland Clinic Volunteer Department was contacted in order to attempt to find an animal therapist for the Euclid Hospital's Behavioral Medicine Unit.



Data

- In Behavioral Medicine units in hospitals such as the Euclid Hospital, group therapies can focus on three areas of therapy, dance/movement therapy, recreational therapy, and music therapy.
- The focus of these groups is to bring patients back to their baseline behaviors because psychiatric patients have usually been brought to the hospital because of escalating inappropriate behaviors in either their nursing homes or at home.
- Dance and movement therapy is as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual; I've personally witnessed a patient saying that she hadn't even realized she had shoulders before movement therapy.
- Recreational therapy also known as therapeutic recreation, is a systematic process that utilizes recreation and other activity-based interventions to address the assessed needs of individuals with illnesses and/or disabling conditions, as a means to psychological and physical health, recovery and well-being, and is treatment service designed to restore, remediate and rehabilitate a person's level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition.
- Lastly, music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapy interventions can be designed to promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, express feelings, enhance memory, improve communication, and promote physical rehabilitation. These expressive therapies are also easily combined to create an interactive experience for both patients and therapists.

Results

- After attempting to contact the Pet Therapy department multiple times over the course of the internship, no pet therapist could be found within the time constraints of the Science Internship program, but could definitely be found given more time
- Time constraints were definitely a factor, and Volunteer Services departments are definitely very busy
- One should be aware that patience and time are needed in order to obtain a trained therapy animal for medical units



Conclusions

- It is beneficial to have at least one therapy animal assigned to each behavioral medicine unit, depending on volunteer's time
- Multi-level benefits because while the pets are in the hospital, they also provide comfort to staff members

Recommendations

- Consider paying for training/certification or even hiring dog therapists if possible
- Cleveland Clinic could make Volunteer Services easier to contact or have emails readily available on website in order to find animal volunteers
- The Clinic does recognize the benefits of Pet Therapy, they have previously noted on social media (Twitter, 2016) that pet volunteers and volunteers registering their pets for therapy would be greatly appreciated
- Another call to the public could be made, or even make use of those pets that are in animal shelters but still well-mannered.
- A possibility would be an online application for pet volunteers or for those searching for pet volunteer
- The Cleveland Clinic and its regional campuses would then have the ability of using a matching service in order to reach dogs and handlers.

