

## Presentation of evidence

**Overview:** This article discusses a professional opinion on the effects of pet therapy in hospitalized pediatric patients. The authors used multiple reliable sources in order to form their opinion.

**The purpose of this study, including research question(s) or hypotheses:** The goal of this study was to prove whether animal-facilitated therapy (AFT) improves the physical and psychological health of hospitalized pediatric patients. The research question in this article is does the use of animals as therapeutic agents within pediatric patients improve their well-being?

**Design:** A medical expert analyzes articles regarding animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and animal-assisted activities (AAA). The expert then gives their professional opinion regarding the question at hand.

**Sample:** Children ages 3-17 years of age that have been hospitalized were included in a quasi-experimental study. They were provided with animal-assisted therapy (AAT).

**Results:** Based on the evidence the authors had, they came to the conclusion that hospitalized pediatric patients did benefit from pet therapy. It improved their physical and psychological health.

### Strength of Study

**Level of study:** 7

**Quality of study:** high

## Recommendation for practice change

Animal-assisted therapy has been proven to improve the physical and psychological health of hospitalized pediatric patients. There are certain aspects of this therapy that need further research including AAT in teens and youth, and the use of animals other than dogs. There is a lack of consistency with the therapy. Each child experiences a different interaction, which makes it difficult to produce consistent results. However, the use of AAT can help to decrease the amount of time spent in hospitals. The cost of AAT is low and the benefits are high. AAT is an effective use of hospital funds. The use of AAT helps to alleviate the fear of health care workers that children have in a hospital. It also gives the child a home-like experience. The child is likely to have a more positive experience during their hospitalization.

## The Impact of Pet Therapy on Pediatric Physical and Psychological Health

By: Kayla Redman and Brenna Smith

### PICOT Question:

In hospitalized pediatric patients, what is the effect of providing pet therapy in comparison to not providing pet therapy on pediatric patients' physical and psychological health?

### Why is this a problem?

As the world of pediatric medicine continues to expand, the techniques and skills being practiced are also broadened. For those that are not aware, children are much more frightened of healthcare workers than the average adult, especially when they are ill or in pain. When caring for a sick child, it is important that they are comfortable, relaxed, and that the environment feels as close to home as possible. These key characteristics will make the overall experience for the child and family less traumatic and hopefully result in a positive outcome. A new approach for pediatric healthcare is pet therapy, which can be used to benefit the psychological and physical health of hospitalized individuals. The areas involved with this type of therapy are medical surgical, oncology, intensive care, and psychiatric units in the acute setting, as well as long-term care facilities. Animal assisted therapy (AAT) has been proven to increase patient satisfaction and comfort, as well as improve their overall physical status. Children are becoming more interested and motivated in their treatment plans when they are given the chance to do it with the help of a furry friend.

### References:

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Stefanini, M. C., Martino, A., Bacci, B., & Tani, F. (2016). The effect of animal-assisted therapy on emotional and behavioral symptoms in children and adolescents hospitalized for acute mental disorders. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 8(2), 81–88. doi: 10.1016/j.eujim.2016.03.001

Uglov, L. S. (2019). The benefits of an animal-assisted intervention service to patients and staff at a children's hospital. *British Journal of Nursing*, 28(8), 509–515. doi: 10.12968/bjon.2019.28.8.509

Tielsch Goddard, A., & Gilmer, M. J. (2015). The Role and Impact of Animals with Pediatric Patients. *Pediatric Nursing*, 41(2), 65–71.

Bachi, K., & Parish-Plass, N. (2017). Animal-assisted psychotherapy: A unique relational therapy for children and adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 22(1), 3–8. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/10.1177/1359104516672549>

## Presentation of evidence

**Overview:** The effect of animal assisted therapy on emotional and behavioral symptoms in children and adolescents hospitalized for acute mental disorders

**Purpose of the study, including research question(s) or hypotheses:** The goal of this study was to assess the effectiveness of animal assisted therapy (AAT) versus standard therapeutic treatment on emotional and behavioral symptoms of children.

**Design:** Pre-post experimental design with randomized controlled trial, with a control group and treatment group.

**Sample:** A sample of 40 children, 11-17 years old, were randomly selected from the population of children admitted to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit of the Meyer Pediatric Hospital in Florence. These 40 individuals were split into a control group (standard therapeutic treatment) and a treatment group (addition of animal assisted therapy).

**Results:** The study found that the addition of AAT to standard treatment can positively impact a child's behavioral and emotional status, as well as improve his or her functioning in society.

### Strength of the study

**Level of the Study:** 2

**Quality of the Study:** medium

## Implications of practice

Pet therapy or animal assisted therapy is categorized as a cost-effective alternative treatment method for hospitalized pediatric patients. Recent reports of AAT have been shown to decrease anxiety and depression, boost communication skills, and soothe the fears of the family and patient. This integrated approach has positively impacted patients' psychological health, along with their physical health. According to Uglov (2019), "the presence of a friendly dog was shown to be effective at reducing the blood pressure (BP) and heart rates of children aged 2 to 6 years of age undergoing simulations of routine examination". This therapy can also be used as an intervention to decrease pain, rather than using analgesics that can cause severe negative effects on the patient.