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Original Article

A pilot survey of animal-facilitated therapy in Southern California and South Dakota nursing homes

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- Abstract
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the current uses of animal-facilitated therapy (AFT), in nursing facilities located in Southern California and South Dakota. A mail questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 105 California and 45 South Dakota nursing facility administrators. Selection criteria for Southern California nursing facilities included a geographical location south of 36 degrees latitude, and listing of pet therapy as a facility activity in the Directory of Nursing Homes (1993). South Dakota nursing facilities were randomly selected. A total of 56 nursing facility administrators from South Dakota and California completed the survey resulting in a 40% return rate.

The study supported previous research indicating the multiple benefits of AFT. Both California and South Dakota nursing facility administrators identified sensory stimulation, facilitation of resident social interaction, stress reduction, and companionship as the top four therapeutic purposes for using pets and animals in the nursing home. Administrators also identified patient-therapist interaction, increasing muscle strength and ROM, pain management, reduction of blood pressure and heart rate, increasing responsibility, self-esteem, and patient independence as therapeutic benefits of pet therapy.

Further research is needed in the field of pet therapy to demonstrate the efficacy of AFT. In addition, occupational therapists should become more involved with the use of AFT for treatment purposes. It has been demonstrated that pet therapy can be used with a variety of diagnoses and conditions and for implementing therapeutic goals. It is recommended that occupational therapists participate in research on pet therapy and consider its use in nursing homes with older patients. It is also recommended that the use of pets in therapy be incorporated into occupational therapy curricula. Copyright © 1996 Whurr Publishers Ltd.

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