



# The Best Therapist Has Fur and Four Legs

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## Objectives

- ❖ To show the effectiveness of pet therapy with the geriatric population
- ❖ To expand the use of pet therapy in medical facilities

## Introduction

Pet therapy involves the interaction of a trained animal and a person who may need assistance with coping or managing health problems. There are many different tasks that service animals can perform including: alerting changes in blood glucose and blood pressure levels, noticing warning signs of strokes and seizures, and improving mood and mental disorders (Better Business Bureau, 2017). Pet therapy has a very broad spectrum of implementations that can be used throughout all areas of the health care field. Common facilities that utilize pet therapy include nursing homes, assisted living facilities, long term rehabilitation centers, and schools. Pet therapy provides people with an opportunity to use non-pharmacological management for their problems. The use of pet therapy is increasing greatly throughout the health care field.

We compared a local facility pet policy to Society for Healthcare Epidemiology Association (SHEA) Expert Guidance policy to further explore the use of pets and the potential expansion of the policies.

## Literature review

Many studies have been done involving pet therapy, with most focusing on canines and felines, however, many farm and exotic animals have been used. Most of the literature did a correlational study, where they compared reactions, mood, and health improvement of those who received pet therapy and those who did not. Most literature focused on health improvements, for example the geriatric and increased mood, autism and increased socialization, those with pain and decreased pain, etc. The human interaction and bond with the pet were also observed. Salivary cortisol levels were tested in one experiment to determine if stress levels were decreased (Duong, A. N., 2010). All the studies favored pet therapy, however discussed their concern with infection control and potential risks for falls. In every experiment there are many benefits to pet therapy including emotional, physical and psychosocial.



## Advantages and disadvantages

Advantages:

- Decrease loneliness and stress, reduce anxiety, increase self-esteem, stimulate memory, increase sense of belonging, purpose, mood, and mobility.

Disadvantages:

- Infection control, allergies, phobias, expense, risk for injury, abuse from patient

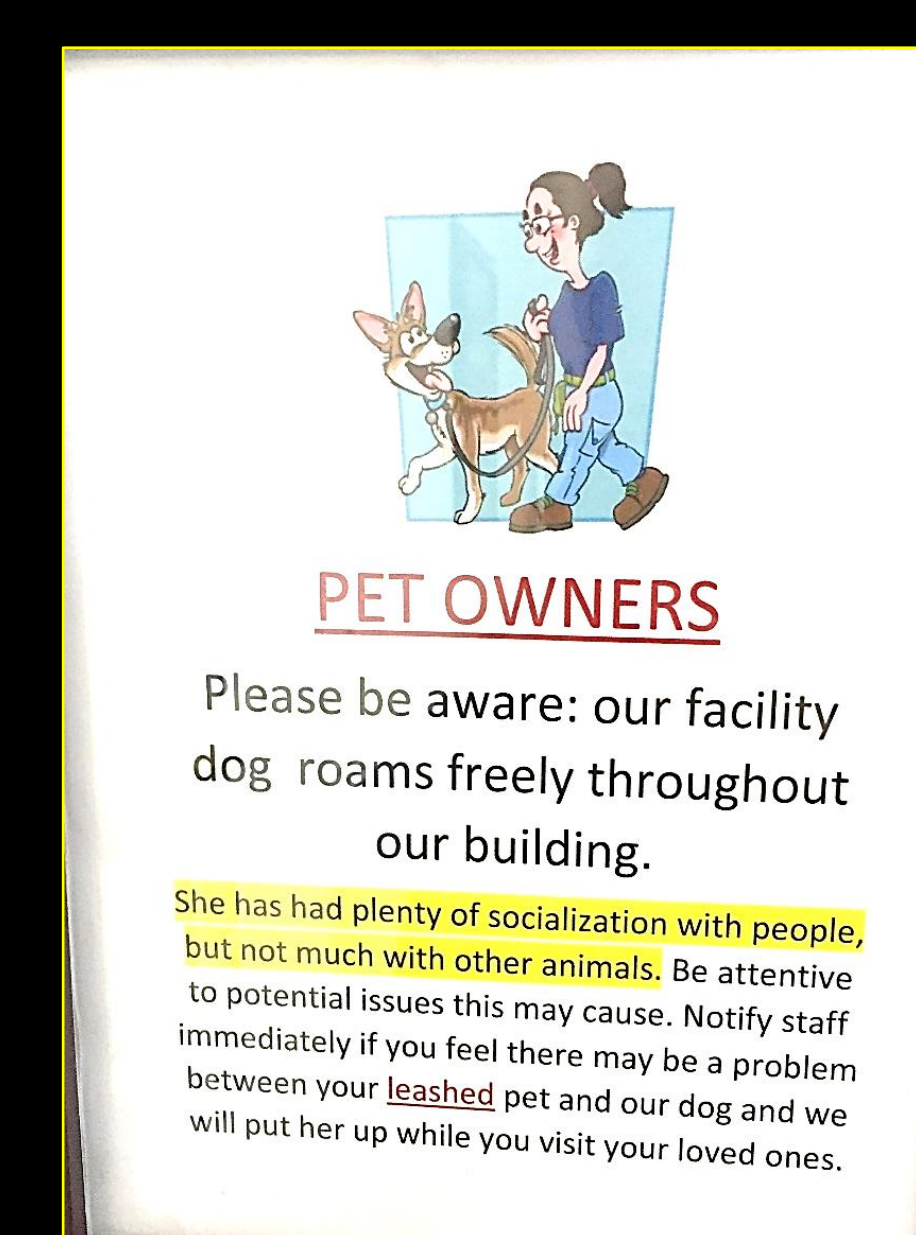
(Cherniack & Cherniack, 2014) (Animal-Assisted Therapy, 2001)

## Policy and Procedures

We compared the pet policy from a local facility to the SHEA Expert Guidance Policy and concluded that the facilities policy could be improved. The facilities policy only stated the names and type of animals that reside in the facility. However, it does contain rules and regulations about visiting pets. These include leash requirements, owner attendance with pets, and encouragement of up to date vaccinations. The facility welcomes all animals without requiring documentation of vaccinations, training, and handler education. We recommend that specific and in depth guidelines be available in all facilities that have an open door pet policy. Such guidelines that need to be executed include:

- ❖ Animals and handlers should be trained before entering the facility and evaluated
- ❖ Conformation that all vaccinations are up to date for handler and pet
- ❖ All animal assisted personnel should receive and sign an agreement to follow facility policies
- ❖ All clinical staff should be educated about animal-assisted activities and the pet policy
- ❖ Patients and health care staff should report any injuries, including scratches, bites, falls, etc. to authoritative personnel
- ❖ If the handler behavior is determined inappropriate during the visitation, visitation rights should be terminated

(Murthy, Bearman, Brown, et. al., (2015)



References available upon request.

