



太和观 THK
ANG MO KIO
THYE HUA KWAN HOSPITAL
太和观医院

Animal Therapy at a Community Hospital

Mohamad Sharil Bin Abdul Rahim, Gelena Giselle Anandarajah
Ang Mo Kio- Thye Hua Kwan Hospital

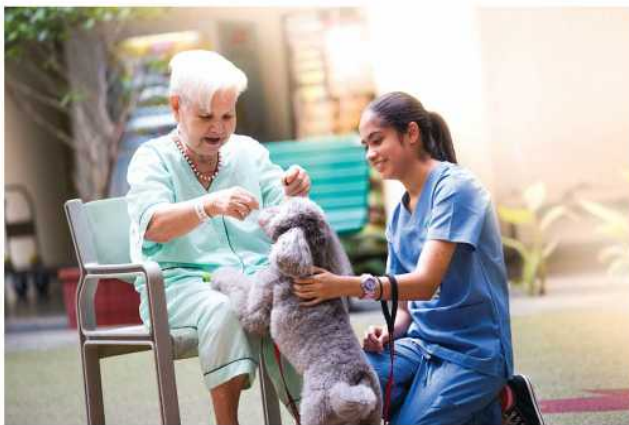
Introduction

Many of the patients in the Community Hospital often become passive, agitated, withdrawn, depressed, and inactive because of the lack of regular visitors or the acute episode. Staying in a hospital for a prolonged period of time can often affect patients' mood and self-esteem. Patients become un-cooperative and decline to play an active role in their recovery. To better engage the patients, Staff and Volunteers came up with an innovative idea to introduce animals in therapeutic activities.

Animal therapy was a result of that effort. Animal therapy draws on the bond between animals and humans in order to help improve and maintain an individual's function and is being used to assist in the process of enhancing the individual's quality of life. Animal therapy is well known to assist the healing process of patients in some countries.

Volunteer Management (VM) Team introduced Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) in 2013 using cats. Upon observing better outcomes and the popularity of the sessions, the team introduced AAA sessions with dogs. In January 2017, the VM team team up with the Occupational Therapy team to start their first Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) session with dogs.

AAA provided opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. AAT was introduced based on the needs and condition of the patient. For elderly dementia patients, hands on interactions with the animal were the most important aspect. AAT provided patients with opportunities to have close physical contact with the animals warm bodies, feeling heartbeats, caress soft skins and coats, notice breathing, communication and giving hugs etc.



Goal / Objective (Plan)

AAA Objectives

- To provide physical, social, cognitive and emotional benefits to the patients
- Using animals as a source of comfort and focus of attention
- To boost patients' mood and enhance their social interaction

AAT Objectives

- Enhanced motivation of patients to participate in Occupational Therapist (OT) to achieve their rehabilitation goals
- Increase the duration of time spent in Occupational Therapy exercises

Problem Analysis (Plan)

At AMKH, we faced difficulty getting patients, especially those with dementia or cognitive impairment, to participate in rehab activities. Patients lay in bed most of the day resulting in deterioration in their physical and mental health. Patients would also occasionally display agitated or aggressive behaviours leading to premature cessation of their therapy session or participation in programs.

Research findings show that introduction of a therapy animal into a hospital setting, increased social interaction observed through smiling, laughter, verbalisations and touching the animal. Research also shows that there is a marked reduction in agitated and aggressive behaviours especially when the animals were introduced during the difficult "sundown" time for dementia patients. A qualitative study done by OTs in the long term care setting showed that animal therapy improved patient's motivation. Patients who would usually refuse therapy came to therapy sessions when they knew animals were going to be there and they also did therapy activities for a longer duration.

For AAA, AMKH carried out our very first cat therapy session in May 2013 in collaboration with Cat Welfare Society (CWS). In the late 2013, Cat-Assisted Therapy Singapore (CATS) came into the picture and conduct cat therapy for the hospital. AMKH collaborated with Save Our Street Dogs to carry out AAT dog therapy in April 2015. Both programmes have been running successfully at AMKH on a monthly basis.

For AAT, a pilot dog therapy program was conducted in 2015 in collaboration with Pawsibility Pte Ltd, a professional animal therapy service provider. Through the pilot program, we found improvements in wellbeing and participation of patients in OT sessions. A volunteer based program was then developed using the PDCA approach to ensure sustainability.

Follow-up (Act)

For the sustainability of the project, the support of committed and dedicated volunteers for AAT sessions is crucial. A stable pool of committed volunteers attended and helped out during the sessions consistently. The program has a strong support from animal therapy organisation like SOSD and CATS.

Regular training is carried out by the VM staff and the OT in charge of the AAT for junior OTs and new volunteers so that the program runs smoothly and efficiently.

Implementation

For AAA sessions we collaborated with Save Our Street Dog (SOSD) and Cat-Assisted Therapy Singapore (CATS). They provided the AAA services for our patients. And for AAT, volunteers with therapy dogs were recruited.

AAA session

During the cat therapy session, the patients gather around the cats and the volunteers would introduce the cats to them. The volunteers ensure that the patients are taught how to handle the cats. The patients were engaged in grooming, petting, stroking, playing teasers and even carrying the cat. The patients were rotated with another set of cats after about 20 to 30 minutes.

For the dog therapy session, the patients were divided into 2 groups. First group would usually be involved in "Catch-fetch-back" where the patients would throw a ball and the dog will assist to fetch it back. This allows the patients to stretch their hands fully while throwing the ball. The stroke patients will also attempt to do it. The other group of patient were involved in petting and playing with the other sets of dogs. After about 20 to 30 minutes, the 2 groups would swap the places and continue the session.

AAT session

In January 2017, we recruited a total of 4 volunteers with 5 therapy dogs. 18 patients who met the inclusion criteria attended at minimum 4, thirty minutes session. The session was conducted by a team of OT, therapy assistant, volunteer and therapy dog. It's a one-to-one session designed by the OT to meet the patient's individual therapy goals. For example, to improve patients standing balance and tolerance, patients were engaged in fetching activity with the therapy dog. And to improve functional mobility skills, the patients would take the therapy dog for a walk in the garden area. To add on, for patients with reduced fine motor skills, we get them to portion the treats into smaller pieces and feed to the dog accordingly. These are some examples of the treatments that the OT prescribes during the session. During the session, the OT would observe the patient's interaction and therapeutic engagement. The observations were recorded using standardized outcome measures. OTs modified the treatment techniques to ensure the therapy goals are met.

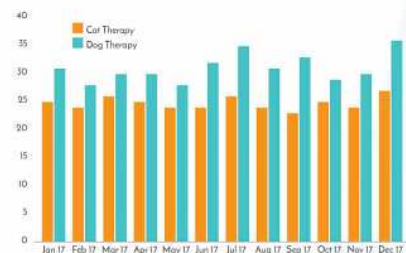


Benefits / Results (Study)

AAA

The presence of animals helped uplift the atmosphere and most patients. To meet the increasing demand, AMKH is holding the AAA sessions twice a month with different animals for each session. Stronger bond between family members and patients were observed during AAA sessions.

For cat therapy, the target is around 24 patients per session and it has been hugely successful since its inception. Patients with dementia are engages in upper body movements by grooming the cats. For the dog therapy session, as we do it at an open space with a target of minimum 30 patients. Please refer below for the breakdown of the attendance for the cat and dog therapy activities sessions.



AAT

Increase in positive indicators and decrease in negative indicators of wellbeing were observed for all patients.

Positive Indicators of wellbeing	Negative indicators of wellbeing
Enhanced communication of choices	Reduce pain
Utilised remaining abilities	Reduce agitation
Responded appropriately to people/ situations	Decreased depression symptoms
Enhanced enjoyment in daily life	
Sense of purpose and showed signs of self-respect	
Relaxed posture	

An increase in Modified Barthel Index score was observed for all patients who attended AAT sessions. This is reflected in the chart below. Orange (admission scores) blue (discharge scores).

