The Use of Pet Therapy in Cardiac Rehabilitation

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Pioneers in the field of Pet Therapy

Florence Nightingale

Sigmund Freud

Boris Levinson
Problem Statement

When used as an adjunct, holistic therapy modality, does the use of pet therapy decrease the rates of depression in patients attending an outpatient cardiac rehabilitation unit?

*Purpose:*

To examine the scores of the PHQ-9 Depression Assessment Tool at the initial interview and at the time of graduation & examine any significant differences in rates of depression.
Significance

- A review of the literature supports the use of pet therapy for patients suffering from cardiac disease or heart failure.

- Studies reveal a multitude of positive benefits:
  - increased levels of self-esteem
  - decreased anxiety & depression
  - increased levels of communication
  - decreased blood pressure & heart rate.

- Patients attending a cardiac rehabilitation unit often feel depressed, anxious, and fearful after being diagnosed with heart disease. The implementation of pet therapy will hope to bring a sense of “normalcy” to the environment.
Design

- The design used for this quality-improvement project is based upon a test re-test methodology utilizing the PHQ-9 Depression Assessment Tool.

- Patients will complete the PHQ-9 at the initial interview and again at the time of graduation.

- Any statistical differences will be evaluated in the scores and compared with a control group.

- Qualitative data will also be extracted from the patient’s perception and lived experiences when interacting with the therapy dogs and volunteer handlers.
Future Implications

• As advanced practice nurses continue to incorporate evidence-based practice into their areas of specialty, animal-assisted therapy will continue to improve the quality of life for patients attending cardiac rehabilitation units.
“It is the intuitive power of animals that can help us heal hurts, lessen stress, feel needed, and express our caring side” (Dr. Marty Becker, DVM).