Animal-Facilitated Therapy Program

Outcomes from Caring Canines, a program for patients and staff on an inpatient surgical oncology unit

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BACKGROUND: Animal-facilitated therapy (AFT) is a complementary medicine intervention. To the authors’ knowledge, no study has investigated the benefits of an AFT program in an adult surgical oncology setting.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of an AFT program on patients and staff on a surgical oncology unit.

METHODS: A quasi-experimental design was used for the patient group, and a pre-/post-test design was used for the staff group. The intervention involved the AFT program being fully integrated on a surgical inpatient unit. Outcomes included patient-reported symptoms and quality-of-life (QOL) outcomes for patients, as well as professional QOL for staff.

FINDINGS: QOL indicators improved for all patients, and the level of energy at follow-up was significantly higher in the AFT group after adjusting for baseline. For staff, compassion satisfaction was high and burnout was low.

KEYWORDS
animal-facilitated therapy; professional quality of life; patient outcomes

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