

Purina-Sponsored Research Shows Benefits of Therapy Dogs for Patients in a Mental Health Crisis

A study by researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, funded by Purina, shows the value of therapy dogs to provide emotional support to hard-to-reach patients with severe mental illness. In this qualitative study, therapy dogs offered support to patients, helping to put them at ease to participate in research about their treatment and care.



PURINA RESEARCH SUMMARY

Therapy dogs provide emotional support to hard-to-reach patients with severe mental illness that helps put them at ease to participate in research about their treatment and care

Researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wanted to show the value of including certified therapy dogs in qualitative research activities with patients in a mental health crisis. This research was sponsored by Purina.

7 Pet Therapy Focus Groups Were Studied, with 38 Patients (Ages 18 to 88)



18 Men



20 Women



Social interactions between patients and researchers were recorded during focus group discussions that included a certified therapy dog using participatory action research methodology to gauge patient engagement on pet therapy activities.

Participating researchers, recreational therapists, volunteer handlers, and patients agreed that having a therapy dog at their discussions was integral to their success.

Certified therapy dogs enriched the study data by:

Increasing Motivation

Motivating patients with mental illness to participate in treatment by countering their tendency to self-isolate and evoking positive feelings.

Patients reported feeling:



Joy



Love



Excited



Energized

Building Rapport

Connecting patients with one another and researchers by creating a safe, open atmosphere that promoted thoughtful discussions.

Patients said therapy dogs:

Creating Connections

Comforting patients so they were able to relate to their own experiences and navigate their social interactions with other patients and researchers.

Patients said therapy dogs:

Broke the Ice



Opened Hearts

Kept Conversations Going



Created Trust

Promoted Socialization



Listened

The results of this study suggest that certified therapy dogs can be used effectively to engage hard-to-reach patients in research about their treatment and care. Therapy dogs increased patients' motivation, helped them build rapport and create connections. This is the first study to show the value of using certified therapy dogs as a participatory research tool in a health setting.



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[Click here](#) to read the research study published in *PLOS ONE*.



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