Abstract: Visiting dog programmes to nursing homes have become popular and recent studies suggest that such visits benefit even people with dementia (PwD) who no longer take much interest in human visitors. This could be very important, since PwD is a growing population group and put special demands on long term care. As dementia progresses and the options of pleasant activities narrow down, apathy, agitation, and other behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) tend to increase, and the opportunities for pleasant encounters decrease. This is a problem for the PwD and their caregivers alike. Moreover, the relationship between BPSD and strains on long term care staff seems to form a vicious cycle. Findings from five areas were integrated: Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia, Needs of People with Dementia in Long Term Care, Wellbeing and Burnout in Dementia Care: Staff, Animal Assisted Interventions in Nursing Homes, and Psychosocial Effects of Human Animal Interactions. We found that visiting dog programmes can have several relevant effects: positive affect during the immediate encounter, the dog as cue to reminiscence, touching the dog as stress-relief for residents and staff, increased conversation during visits and beyond, the dog as catalyst of positive perceptions of strangers, and several others. The poster concludes with the integrated model of probable pathways, state of the evidence for each aspect, and implications for future research.

Problem: How to counteract?
Aim: Hypothetical model
Method: Selective review of 5 fields

Improvement for resident

- Make smile Invite touch
- Non-stressful interaction – viable
- Positive experience Mood increase
- Can fond memories
- Elicit communication

Counteracts vicious cycle

- Reduced BPSD
- Reduced staff strain
- Reduced burn-out risk

PwD

AAI

Add positive interaction option. Non-related communication topic

More adapted spouses/spouse talk.

More positive staff-resident talk?

Make smile

Added interaction option

Mind

Make smile

Increased

Reduced observation

Evidence, conjecture and research implications

Many pathways of the model, notably direct effects of AAI on residents, are supported by several studies. Studies with strong designs and large Ns are still sparse but some exist.

Staff implications are underresearched. Most staff related pathways in the model are conjectures or based on informal observations. Future studies should address whether AAI increases positive staff resident-communication, decreases staff feelings of futurity, and reduce staff burn-out risk.

Relief for staff

- Improved social interaction balance
- Decrease feeling of futurity
- Improved wellbeing
- Positive mood
- Enhanced mood

References

Contact: tia@hum.aau.dk

# Aalborg University
# Aarhus University

In Denmark, the “Staff perception of between visit effects?” dimension of the “Optimal dog visits” (PI Karen Thodberg) project funded by TrygFonden; final results 2019

If considering an animal assisted intervention, please consult dog welfare and best practice guidelines.