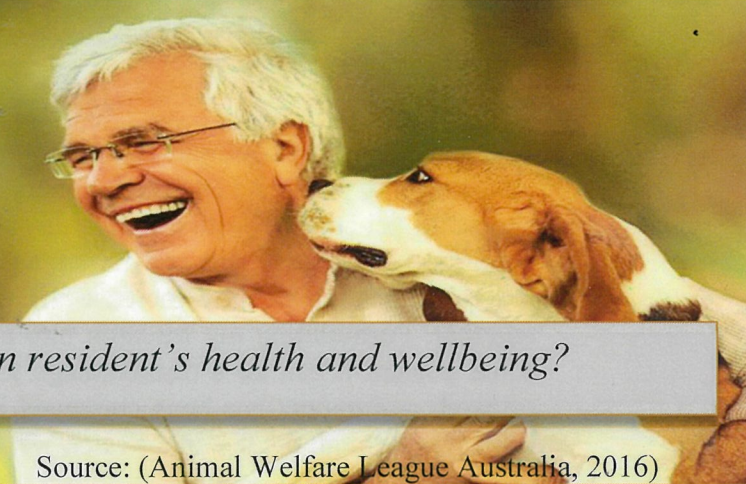


Animals in Aged Care Facilities

By Letitia Kirk



Do animals that live within aged care facilities have a positive influence on resident's health and wellbeing?

Source: (Animal Welfare League Australia, 2016)

Introduction:

It can be a difficult challenge adjusting to life inside an aged care facility as the importance of 'place' in their lives, has changed (Prosser, Townsend & Staiger, 2008). With the significant increase in average life expectancy in New Zealand, many more of us are heading into aged care facilities for long-term living options and access to healthcare. This transition for individuals can bring a range of emotions such as, a loss of independence and autonomy over their lives, a loss of social networks and a general loss of self-worth and self-importance. Instead of looking at the biomedical point of view and with this information in mind, I wanted to take this opportunity to explore the use of animals in aged care facilities and find out whether this can positively influence residents health and well being.

Review of Literature:

Research shows that residents living in aged care facilities have had a strong life history with animals as a part of their social and emotional support systems (Banks & Banks, 2002). The use of animals can positively influence resident's health and wellbeing as they create a familiar environment residents were once used too, which in reality makes the facility appear less institutionalised and helps aid in the psychological impacts, transitioning into an aged care facility can create.

Research has also found that animals serve as a catalyst for social interactions, proving successful in enhancing verbal communication among older adults (Lori & Kogan, 2001). Their presence provides mutual interest and a topic of conversation among staff and other residents helping to build and encourage new friendships. It is evident throughout research that animals create a significant improvement in older adults cognitive function, showing a mean increase in individuals Mini-Mental State Examination results. Along with that, animals have effectively reduced loneliness and increased social isolation, which has been said to be associated with the onset of dementia and depression (Banks & Banks, 2002).

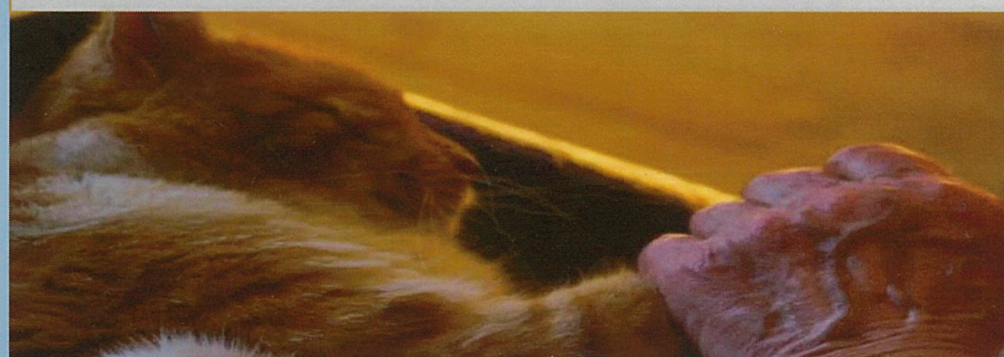
Animals in aged care facilities can alleviate stress, improve blood pressure and promote greater physical activity in elderly residents through the simple actions of feeding, playing, grooming and petting an animal. Stroking and caring for an animal naturally triggers the release of endorphins, which therefore reduces the intensity of stress and can improve the health and wellbeing of an older adult (Cherniack & Cherniack, 2014)

References:

Prosser, L., Townsend, M., & Staiger, P. (2008). Older people's relationships with companion animals: a pilot study. *Gerontological Care and Practice*, 20(3), 29-32.

Recommendations:

- To work on informing Governments, aged care management teams and the wider community about the benefits on older adults being able to continue a relationship with animals, in the context of an aged care facility. – In order for aged care facilities in New Zealand to implement the idea of animals, information needs to be issued to all counter parts involved, therefore allowing individuals to see the benefits and make an informed choice.
- To implement an on-going compulsory review and evaluation meeting among aged care facilities that decide to allow resident animals. – Just like anything it still remains important to consider the safety of these residents. Potential risks should be considered and addressed. Along with safety these review meetings would also allow the staff and residents to give feedback during the initial adjustment period. Individuals can voice their concerns, which can allow the management team to make necessary improvements.



Conclusion: Source: Google Images

The evidence shown in the literature review supports the conclusion that animals that live within aged care facilities do have a positive influence on resident's health and wellbeing. It has been stated in multiple studies that there is a huge reduction in time spent alone in facilities that provide resident animals, compared to facilities that don't provide the option. I believe that we as health professionals need to provide a holistic approach to care, in the quest to achieve optimal health and wellbeing for our older adults.

Cherniack, P. E., & Cherniack, A. R. (2014). The Benefit of Pets and Animal Assisted Therapy to the Health of Older Individuals. *Gerontology and Geriatrics Research*, 9, 623-203. doi:10.1155/2014

Lori, R., & Kogan, M. S. (2001). Effective Animal-Intervention for Long Term Care Residents. *Activities, Adaption & Aging*, 25(1), 31-45. doi:10.1300/J016v25n01_03

Banks, M. R., & Banks, W. A. (2002). The Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Loneliness in an Elderly Population in Long-Term Care Facilities. *Journal of Gerontology*, 57, M428-M4323. 20(3), 29-32.

Rationale:

A poster is a visual communication tool, used to deliver a depth of information that supports a person's work (Rowe, 2009). In this case I am using it to provide a logical summary of my evidence-based literature that was gathered in assignment one (Tolliday, 2016). You can choose to get creative with this tool through text, colour and graphic images, therefore allowing you to attract a particular target audience (Tolliday, 2016). Due to my target audience being broad, I wanted to convey my information in a fun manner making it catch individual's attention and increase the chance of a positive response, therefore I used text boxes and colours that work effectively together. Formulating my research into a poster meant that I was able to accommodate a lot of text and image information, which for some posters it can be a disadvantage to audiences, as it can be deemed "boring" with too much information. However the way my research assignment has been conveyed it is necessary to include this relevant information (Rowe, 2009). Therefore the most effective form was through the use of a poster.

Reference:

Tolliday, D. (2016). The Advantages of Posters. Retrieved from <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/advantages-posters-63269.html>
Rowe, N. (2009). What impacts do posters have on academic knowledge transfer? *BMC Medical Education*, 9, 340-341.
doi: 10.1186/1472-6920-9-71

PECOT Classification:	Information relating to question:	Rationale:
Population:	Older Adults living in aged care facilities.	I have chosen older adults in aged care facilities, as they are a vulnerable population in society that usually experience a wide range of psychological complications from the transition into a residential care facility, thus impacting on their overall health and wellbeing.
Exposure/Intervention:	Older adults living with animals inside their aged care facility.	I will look at articles that provide evidence-based research on the positive influences; animals living within residential care facilities have on resident's health and wellbeing.
Comparison/Control:	Older adults living in an aged care facilities where animals are not allowed.	I am interested to know whether animals living in a residential care facility have a positive influence on older adults health and wellbeing, compared to residential facilities that do not allow animals.
Outcome:	The benefits of animals living in aged care facilities on older adults health and wellbeing.	Due to the mixed opinions of animals living in aged care facilities, I want to find out whether there is clear and concise research on the benefits of animals living in residential care facilities on older adults health and wellbeing.
Time:	N/A	N/A