

Animal assisted interventions in dementia care: effects on quality of life and neuropsychiatric symptoms.

Professionals and caretakers in dementia care face several challenges on a daily basis. Enhancing (perceived) quality of life in patients who have a debilitating, progressive, neurodegenerative disease - complicated by disruptive neuropsychiatric symptoms - is often difficult and daunting. The conceptual frameworks explaining behavior and quality of life in dementia all share the same features: they are multidimensional and complex.

Successful dementia care interventions usually focus on one or more aspects of these multidimensional models. Preliminary research has shown that animal assisted interventions (AAI) are a promising complementary intervention in dementia care and seem capable of influencing several of the factors involved in quality of life and neuropsychiatric symptoms. Most studies, however, struggle with providing compelling, significant, scientific evidence for the effectiveness of AAI, a complex intervention in the complex, multifactorial system that is dementia care.

We aim to better understand the effectiveness of AAI in dementia care, focusing on quality of life and neuropsychiatric symptoms. A best practice AAI intervention using visiting dogs and FurReal Friend toys will be evaluated in a small-scale pilot design study and subsequently used in a large-scale intervention study.

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