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Brief Report

Animal-Assisted Therapy for Elderly Schizophrenic Patients: A One-Year Controlled Trial

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Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) has been used as a therapeutic tool in various psychiatric populations, but there have been no published studies with elderly schizophrenic patients. The authors evaluated, in a blinded, controlled manner, the effects of AAT in a closed psychogeriatric ward over 12 months. Subjects were 10 elderly schizophrenic patients and 10 matched patients (mean age: 79.1 ± 6.7 years). The outcome measure was the Scale for Social Adaptive Functioning Evaluation (SAFE). AAT was conducted in weekly 4-hour sessions. Treatment encouraged mobility, interpersonal contact, and communication and reinforced activities of daily living (ADLs), including personal hygiene and independent self-care, through the use of cats and dogs as "modeling companions." The SAFE scores at termination showed significant improvement compared with baseline scores and were significantly more positive for the AAT group on both Total SAFE score and on the Social Functions subscale. AAT proved a successful

tool for enhancing socialization, ADLs, and general well-being.



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