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The role of animal-assisted therapy in mental and physical functioning in older adults

Ching Wen Cheng¹, E Kipling Webster¹, Wei Cheng Chen², Victor Molinari² and Neil M Johansen¹

¹Louisiana State University, USA

²University of South Florida, USA

The worldwide geriatric population rises constantly. The care for older adults must be prioritized, especially due to aging's effects on degeneration and dysregulation of physical and psychological function. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a nonpharmacological treatment that can alleviate the symptoms of aging and assist older adults functioning. The purpose of the present review is to analyze the role of AAT in geriatric functioning by evaluating both the mental and physical outcomes after an intervention. Seventeen relevant studies were collected from PubMed, Wiley Online Library, and International Peer-Reviewed and Open Access Journal for the Nursing Specialists. Subjects within these studies were above 65 years of age regardless of the health or patients. Inclusion criteria were either psychological or physiological data on older individuals in either institutions or the community. We further evaluated each effect and classified each into specific geriatric functioning. The findings demonstrate that there is a consensus that AAT improves psychological function in older populations, including better cognitive function, stabilization of mental status, and increased socialization. Additionally, AAT also benefits physiological function in aging. Although the deterioration of organ function with aging cannot be eliminated, the potential improvements from AAT were seen in muscle, bone, cardiovascular, pulmonary, brain, and neuronal systems. We concluded that AAT interventions can elicit positive effects, maintaining psychological and physiological functioning as a result of improving the quality of life of older adults.

foryvi@gmail.com