

ABSTRACT

Canine-assisted therapy is an alternative therapy used in various aspects of healthcare, however, there is a lack of implementation in the palliative population. Canine-assisted therapy can provide many benefits including relieving stress after a terminal diagnosis and increasing comfort in the dying individual. The purpose of this project is to research canine-assisted therapy, discover its various benefits, determine safety considerations, distinguish best-practice, and understand how canine-assisted therapy would apply to the palliative population. The research findings propose why and how this therapy should be implemented and discuss an evidence-based plan for application into the hospice population. Included in the project are modification and dissemination plans, educational materials for staff, measurement tools, a timeline, and a safe and effective plan of care to make implementation successful, evidence-based, patient specific, and comfort oriented.

PICO QUESTION

In recently diagnosed terminally ill patients, would canine-assisted therapy compared to no alternative therapy provide emotional and stress relief?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon analysis of the literature, major themes of canine-assisted therapy emerged.

Canine-assisted therapy has been shown to...

- Improve quality of life ⁽¹⁾,
- Provide emotional and stress relief ⁽²⁾,
- Improve comfort ⁽³⁾, and
- Increase communication with healthcare providers ⁽⁴⁾.

When implementing canine-assisted therapy, inclusion and exclusion criteria ⁽⁵⁾ and individualized interventions⁽⁶⁾ must be taken into consideration.



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CANINE-ASSISTED THERAPY TO PROVIDE RELIEF FOR TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS

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PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Current literature supports the indication that canine-assisted therapy would offer many benefits for the recently diagnosed terminally ill population ^(1,2,3,4). Canine-assisted therapy must be properly implemented and take into consideration safety and liability issues to be successful ^(5,6). By creating various deliverables, company standards and certifications will be clear, allowing implementation to be effective. Once implemented, the intervention can be evaluated and modified. Evaluation and modification will further prepare the intervention to be disseminated so that the intervention can be universal. Continuous evaluation will ensure the intervention is safe and current best practice.

Plan and Development

Deliverables addressed in the implementation of canine-assisted therapy include...

- Certification of the dog and handler
- A standard plan of care
- Patient consent
- Staff educational handout
- In-service presentation material
- Staff education testing
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Timeline

Evaluation

- An evaluation tool has been created to assess emotional and stress relief of patients utilizing canine-assisted therapy.
- The tool will be utilized before and after the intervention, analyzing the effectiveness.
- Emotional and stress relief will be evaluated in the pilot population.
- Modification will address concerns to prepare for further implementation.
- The same tool can be used for evaluation company-wide and universally.
- Evaluation will continue throughout implementation to make sure best practice and outcomes are being reached.



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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kolcaba's Theory of Comfort ⁽⁷⁾

- Addresses how to achieve holistic comfort and the importance of nursing interventions,
- Describes comfort as measurable, and
- Guides the master's project in purpose and importance.

The Model for Evidence-Based Practice Change ⁽⁸⁾

- Six step framework to guide intervention into practice;
- Incorporates modification, implementation, and dissemination;
- Utilized as a framework for the investigation and implementation of the master's project.

CONCLUSIONS

A literature review supports the many benefits of canine-assisted therapy in the palliative population. Although canine-assisted therapy comes with risks, these have been identified and safety deliverables have been created to make the therapy as safe as possible. Kolcaba's Theory of Comfort and The Model for Evidence-Based Practice Change have been utilized to effectively drive implementation and dissemination and meet specific goals of the palliative population. Following the proposed plan and utilizing the provided deliverables will allow implementation and dissemination of canine-assisted therapy to occur in the extremely needing and so deserving palliative population.

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