Pet Therapy: Who Benefits and What are the Risks?

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In the beginning……(1988!)

• ASPCA Pet Therapy

• Puppies and kittens from the shelter were taken to schools, senior homes, several hospitals

• What were the risks and benefits?
Risks and Benefits of ASPCA Program - 1988

Benefits

• Public relations and promotion of shelter animals
• Support value of pets for people
• Potential benefits for people in the institutions

Risks

• Bites and scratches
• Rabies and other zoonotic diseases
• Stress on the animals
• Time off the adoption floor
My Response……

• Suspend the active program

• Contact the Delta Society
  • Training and certification of handler-dog teams
  • Guidelines and best practices

• Assign a staff coordinator
  • Recruit volunteers
  • Provide training classes
  • scholarships for ASPCA alumni
The first unresolved question …..

• Are the animals just fuzzy aspirin?

• Objects?
• How are they different from art or music therapy?
What I’ve learned in the years …

Boris Levinson

• In 1953 began to use his dog Jingles in therapy with children.
• 1961 - Presented a paper at the American Psychological Association on what became Pet Therapy.
• Formation of the Delta Society
Wide Range of Activities and Practices

- Therapy
  - Animal Assisted Activities
- Animal Assisted Therapy
- Service
  - Guides
  - Assistance
- Detection
  - Seizure
  - Disease
### Animal Assisted Activities/Therapy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Activities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Therapy</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Casual or informal</td>
<td>• Formal designed program</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recreational</td>
<td>• Specific goals for an individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>• No specific goals</td>
<td>• Involvement of other health care professionals</td>
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<td>• Often with groups</td>
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Service

- Seeing Eye Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs
- Assistance Dogs
Detection

• Seizure Alert
• Hypoglycemic Alert
• Cancer Alert
Emerging questions and issues

• Physical stress on dogs

• Do it yourself efforts

• Vague definitions and standards

Americans with Disabilities Act – Service animal is any guide dog, signal dog or other animal *trained* to provide an individual with a disability with assistance.
A Second Question.....

Is there a need for more specific regulation of programs that use animals for therapy and assistance?
Beyond Man’s best friend …..

Other species have also been added to the options:

• Cats
• Chickens
• Rabbits
• Horses
  • Therapeutic riding
  • Miniature guides
• Wild species
The Wild Ones …..

Helping Hands

Dolphin Swim
What are the issues with wild animals ……

• What does it mean to be *domesticated*?
• How is domesticated different from *tame*?
• Where do the animals come from?
• Risks to people?
  • Bites, scratches and aggression
  • Zoonoses
• Risks to the animals?
  • Training methods
  • Confinement and stress
  • Physical injury

Should WILD ANIMALS be part of therapy or assistance?
Summary

• Animals – dogs in particular can play a range of roles in enhancing the health and well-being of humans

• Care must be taken to protect the welfare of both animal and human participants
Three questions ....

• Are the animals more than fuzzy aspirins? Are they simply objects that facilitate interaction or does their relationship play a role?

• Should there be greater regulation to clarify pet therapy and assistance animals are defined, and permitted?

• Should wild animals be permitted?