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Effects of animal-assisted therapy on the physical and psychological health for the elderly with dementia

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Dementia results from the progressive deterioration of the brain. They even lose the ability of self-caring. This study was to explore the effects of intervention in animal-assisted therapy AAT for people with dementia. The experimental group was set as 18 people with average age 78.5 ± 5.8 years to accept once a week, a total of nine-week AAT group program intervention. And control group was set as 17 people with average age 77.6 ± 8.2 years, nine-week without animal group program. Before & after interventions, we checked blood pressure, autonomic nervous system function evaluation (frequency domain analysis of heart rate variability), Depression Scale, positive behavioral observation and cognitive assessment scale. The results showed that: In physiological indicators, diastolic blood pressure was decreased in both of the experimental group and the control group but with less significant difference in between. However, the heartbeat spacing (ln RR), standard deviation (ln SD), total power (ln TP), and high frequency (ln HF) were increased with significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in experimental group. That is, AAT on heart rate and autonomic nervous system affected. In psychological indicators, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) and positive behavior showed a significant improvement for both groups but experimental group was doing better than the control group. For cognitive indicators, the experimental group improved significantly before and after cognitive testing but the control group was less changed. The study suggested that AAT can be prompted to improve the function of physiological, psychological and cognitive for the elderly with dementia.

Biography

Ms. SHIH, SHU- LING is a Certificated Diabetes Educator at Sijhih Cathay General Hospital. She received a master degree of nursing from National Taipei University of Nursing and Health science and was authorized by a Certificate of Master Animal Assisted Therapist.

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