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Integrating animal-assisted interventions in nursing curriculum

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People love their animals. Sixty-two percent of U.S. homes have pets and 75% of homes with children have at least one pet (Fine, 2010). The human-animal bond (HAB) is strong and affects the health status of patients across the lifespan. Nurses are quintessential in the assessment of the human-animal bond and implementation of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in healthcare institutions. Complementary and alternative therapies, which include AAI, have been incorporated in the AACN Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice and are also part of the NCLEX blueprint. However, few nursing programs address AAI in the nursing curriculum. Curricular analysis shows three of the 26 nursing courses in the undergraduate BSN program at California Baptist University discuss AAI, and only one, Mental Health, includes theoretical content with learning activities and evaluation methods. The integrated curriculum approach suggested by Manor (1991) provides guidelines for incorporating AAI in both theoretical content and clinical application. This method was used to thread AAI throughout the nursing program in core nursing courses at each level of the program. Faculty created learning activities and evaluation methods building on critical thinking skills. A vital component of the process was to have a certified human-animal intervention specialist and trained therapy animal on staff at the School of Nursing. As a result, AAI was integrated at all levels of the nursing program.

Biography

Juliann Perdue has completed her Doctor in Nursing Practice (DNP) from Western University of Health Sciences in 2012. She is the Undergraduate Nursing Program Director, at California Baptist University in Riverside, California. She has specialized in animal-assisted therapy and is a certified human-animal bond intervention specialist (CHAIS). She has also peer reviewed numerous articles on complementary and alternative therapies.

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