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Behavioral health staff's perceptions of pet-assisted therapy: an exploratory study.

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Abstract

The purpose and objectives of this exploratory descriptive study were threefold: to assess the impact of pet-assisted therapy on the overall well-being of behavioral health staff, to document whether pet-assisted therapy affected the retention of behavioral health staff, and to explore and describe therapeutic measures behavioral health staff implemented in using pet-assisted therapy in the delivery of mental health patient care. The participants in this study were 10 behavioral health staff members who were involved with the pet-assisted therapy program at a private psychiatric hospital in a Chicago suburb. Themes that emerged from the study included Self-Awareness, Morale, Innovative Therapeutic Strategies, Challenges, and Future Directions. This article describes these themes in detail, provides quotations from participants to further highlight meaning, and discusses the powerful effect of pet-assisted therapy on both patients and staff in the therapeutic milieu.

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