Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) in Research and Clinical Practice

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WHAT IS HAI?
Any interaction between humans and animals:
- Educational outreach or activities that discuss the topic of animals or pets
- Pets in households
- Animal visitation from registered therapy animals
- Animal assisted therapy (AAT) and animal assisted activities (AAA)

HOW SHOULD WE RESEARCH THIS?
- Assess benefits or success of outreach
- Obtain information on the bond between humans and their pets
- Targeted animal therapy
  - Importance of registered and insured therapy animals: PetPartners
  - Train ‘both ends of the leash,’ minimize public health concerns
LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING HAI RESEARCH

- Small, selective samples
- Pre- and post-test designs without the use of a control group or statistical control procedures
- Narrow scope of assessment
- Lack of mixed methods designs
- Lack of high quality existing data
- Human-animal relationships can take many different forms
- Ethical concerns with animals in intervention research
COLLABORATIVE WELL-DEVELOPED RESEARCH NEEDED

- Veterinary, medical and social science researchers needed as a team
- Growing field of interest
- Collaboration and teams are key
- Standard of care for HAI programs
- Current studies
- Future possibilities
‘PET STUDY’: HAI IN MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH

Positive Engagement Together:
Exploring the role of animals in the lives of military-connected youth

Collecting data to provide initial information about the covariation between animal ownership and psychological and physical health in middle and high school students.
R.E.A.D. PROGRAM

Pilot study:
Paws for People R.E.A.D. Program
Small sample size
Potential for further research

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Figure 1: Change in Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) scores between baseline and week 5 in the Dog versus Control Groups.

Figure 2: Change in Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) scores between baseline and week 5 in the Dog versus Control Groups.

PARTNERING WITH PETS TO ACHIEVE WELLNESS: PROJECT PAWS

Collaborative future project with the Center for Youth Wellness at Tufts Medical Center by teaching healthy lifestyles to overweight teens through animals

10 week program:
- Animal visitation
- Videos/cases
- ‘You be the vet’
- Treats
- Portions
- Media
- Social support
FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE HAI RESEARCH

- Clinical settings
  - HAI programs to improve patient physical or mental health
- Educational outreach
  - Integrating knowledge about human and animal well-being
- Setting new standards
  - Establishing empirically-predicated best practice for research and interventions
- Collaborative and truly novel partnerships
  - Multi-disciplinary projects aimed at health and positive development

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