

# Animal Assisted Therapy as An Element of Green Care

---

Alex Sargsyan, DNP, ANP-BC, CNE, RN  
East Tennessee State University



# Green Care Therapy Definition

---

- Green care therapy is a nature-based approach to promoting and maintaining health
  - Care farming
  - Animal assisted therapies
  - Therapeutic horticulture
  - Facilitated exercise in an outdoor setting





# History of Green Care

---

- Traditional hospital gardens
- Monastery courtyard
- Healing spaces





# Geel in Flanders

---

- Established in 13<sup>th</sup> century
  - Village for “mentally distressed pilgrims”
  - Worship at the shrine of St. Dymphna
  - Residents care for pilgrims
  - First example of therapeutic community
  - Documented cases of recovery
- *Modern day Geel, is located 37m north-east of Brussels, Belgium*

(Bloor,1988)





# Other Historic Examples

---

- Victorian mental asylums
- Tuberculosis sanatoriums
- 1940s Therapeutic communities in the UK





# Disconnect from Nature

---

- Urbanization of the society
- Growth of suburban areas
- Loss of connection with the natural world
- Disconnect from the ways how food produced





# Reestablishing the Connection with The Nature

---

- Reduction of pre-existing stress levels
- Mood enhancement
- Creating “restorative environment”
- Physical exercise
- Social interaction
- Connection between accessible “acreage” of green space and population’s psychological wellbeing

(Takano et al, 2002; De Vries et al, 2003; Grahn and Stigsdotter, 2003).







# Animals in Green Care

---

○



# Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI)

---

- Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)
- Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA)
- Service animals
- Companion animals



(Sargsyan, 2021)





# Physiological benefits of AAI

---

- Changes in CV function
- Changes in neurotransmitter
- Animal ownership increases one year survival rate after acute MI
  - Mortality of 28% for non- owners vs. 5.7% for pet owners
- AAA for patients with schizophrenia resulted in improved social and conversational skills

(Friedmann and Thomas, 1995; Barak et al, 2001)





# What Causes AAI Benefits?

---

- Social support theory
  - Person is cared for, loved, esteemed
  - Belonging to a network of mutual obligations
  - Buffer against stress responses or illness
  
- Human-animal relationship may also contribute to social support
  - Replacement for human social support
  - Enhance reorganization after an illness
  - Reestablish routines

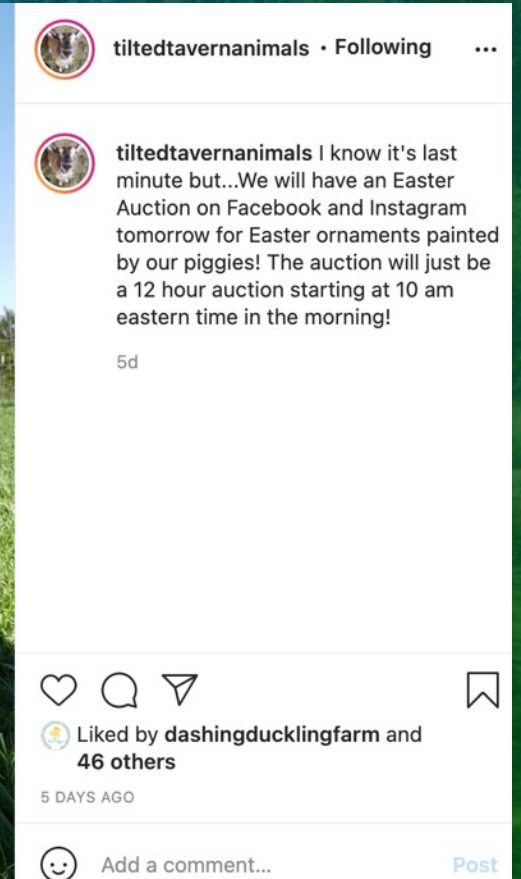


(Cassel, 1974; McNicholas and Collis, 2006)



# AAT with Farm Animals

- Patients with physical or psychiatric illness
- Ride/entertainment
  - Horses, donkeys
- Work/care
  - Cows
  - Sheep
  - Pigs
  - Rabbits
  - Chicken





# Call Ducks as providers of Green Care Therapies

---

- Memphis Peabody Hotel
- Highly trainable
- Docile
- Calming presence
- Miniature size





# Peacebunny Island, Inc Experience

---

- Caleb Smith
- Rabbit Sanctuary
- Private Island on Mississippi River
- AAT training
- COVID 19 and Bunnies



(Gillette, 2021)





# Possible Research Questions

---

- *Are green care based cardiac rehabilitation programs as effective as traditional cardiac rehabilitation center based programs in regards to patients' engagement and participation?*
- *What are the personal experiences of the patients in a green care based cardiac rehabilitation program?*

I Just love  
Research





# Questions?

---





# References

---

- Barak, Y., Savorai, O., Mavashev, S. and Beni, A. (2001) 'Animal-Assisted Therapy for Elderly Schizophrenic Patients: A One-Year Controlled Trial'. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 9(4), 439-442.
- Burls, A. (2007) 'People and green spaces: promoting public health and mental well-being through ecotherapy'. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 6(3), 24-39.
- Cassel, J. (1974). Psychosocial Processes and "Stress": Theoretical Formulation. *International Journal of Health Services*, 4(3), 471-482.
- De Vries, S., Verheij, R. A., Groenewegen, P. P. and Spreeuwenberg, P. (2003) 'Natural environments – healthy environments? An exploratory analysis of the relationship between greenspace and health'. *Environment and Planning A*, 35, 1717-31.
- Friedmann, E. and Thomas, S. A. (1995) 'Pet ownership, social support, and one-year survival after acute myocardial infarction in the Cardiac Arrhythmia Suppression Trial (CAST)'. *American Journal of Cardiology*, 76, 1213-1217.



# References

---

- Gillette, S. (2021, March 18). Bunnies As “Comfort Animals”: Meet the 16-Year-Old Boy Training Rabbits At His Island Sanctuary. *PEOPLE.Com*. <https://people.com/pets/teen-trains-rabbits-therapy-animals-at-peacebunny-island-sanctuary/>
- Grahn, P. and Stigsdotter, U. A. (2003) ‘Landscape planning and stress’. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 2, 1-18.
- McNicholas, J., & Collis, G. M. (2006). ‘Animals as social supports: insights for understanding animal- assisted therapy’. In A. H. Fine (Ed.) *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy* (2nd ed., pp. 49–71). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.
- Sargsyan, A. (2021) Animal Assistants in Healthcare. *American Nurse*, 16(1)
- Takano, T., Nakamura, K. and Watanabe, M. (2002) ‘Urban residential environments and senior citizens’ longevity in megacity areas: the importance of walkable green spaces’. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 56, 913-8.

