

# Pets and their therapeutic effects

March 24 2014, by Marie Daniels

---



A prestigious *Veterinary Record* journal has published a feature in which Professor Daniel Mills and Dr Sophie Hall discuss the therapeutic effects of companion animals.

Professor Mills, from the University of Lincoln's School of Life Sciences, and Dr Hall, who will be joining the team on a project related to pet dogs and families with autistic children, also focus on the influence of pets on childhood development in the article for *Veterinary Record*.

Despite a growing body of evidence indicating many benefits

surrounding the relationship between people and pets, the authors suggest even more novel interventions using [companion animals](#) are possible in preventative healthcare.

They conclude: "Animal companionship is potentially more cost-effective and socially acceptable than technological solutions. Companion animals should not be considered a luxury or unnecessary indulgence, but rather, when cared for appropriately, they should be seen as valuable contributors to [human health](#) and wellbeing and, as a result, society and the broader economy."

Pets are often used to support people, but there are few controlled investigations into the effects of human-animal companionship in medical settings, and this is an area that researchers are keen to develop further at the University following Dr Hall's appointment.

Along with reducing overt emotional responses such as anxiety, there is evidence to suggest that animal companionship can be highly influential in reducing a sense of isolation.

The constant companionship of an animal has been shown to reduce feelings of loneliness in elderly care home residents. And a further study with patients in palliative care showed that the presence of a dog, cat or rabbit improved the mood of patients. Similar mood changes have also been observed in children with autism and Alzheimer's patients.

The team is now engaged in a long term follow-up of their earlier controlled study, in conjunction with the Parents Autism Workshops and Support Network, examining the effects of pet dog ownership on UK families with an autistic child. Results from the initial study are due to be reported soon in the scientific press. Uniquely, this has examined the effects on the child, primary carer and wider family, since it is hypothesised that all of these might benefit from the companionship

provided by a dog.

The positive effects of animals in reducing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions may improve not only quality of life but can also help with the development of effective interventions.

Previous research in the field of human health and medical psychology has provided evidence to suggest that dog and cat owners have better psychological and physical health than non-owners. Dog owners are also reported to recover more quickly after serious mental and physical illness, and even make fewer visits to their doctor. All of these effects might have a significant impact on NHS costs at a time when government is looking for cost savings,

The authors comment: "We should be curious about all the ways companion animals can potentially help us and embrace the opportunities provided by a greater appreciation of the impact of companion animals on our lives.

"It is perhaps ironic that in a world that seems to be increasingly encouraging the development of technologies to make our lives easier, an obvious answer to many of our problems may be literally staring us in the face (or sitting on our lap)."

**More information:** The paper is available online:  
[veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/135/12/2014-03-pets-therapeutic-effects.html](https://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/135/12/2014-03-pets-therapeutic-effects.html)

Provided by University of Lincoln

Citation: Pets and their therapeutic effects (2014, March 24) retrieved 27 April 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2014-03-pets-therapeutic-effects.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.