

Attitudes of Nursing Staff Toward Animal-Assisted Therapy

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Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) has been demonstrated to reduce stress and improve morale among both patients and staff members. Little is known about the impact of AAT on staff recruitment and retention. This research was designed to address this issue. Data were collected from both current and new nurses, patient care technicians and other clinicians.

The survey was completed by 147 current staff members and 200 new employees. Participants included nurses (RNs), patient care technicians (PCTs) and other clinicians. The demographics are summarized below.

Position	Staff	
	Current (n=147)	New (n=200)
RN	62 (42.2%)	128 (63.7%)
PCT	54 (36.7%)	58 (28.9%)
Other	29 (19.7%)	14 (7.0%)

All current employees strongly agreed (92%) or agreed (8%) that they were familiar with the Animal Assisted Therapy program at Edward. Current staff members were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with three statements:

- Seeing an AAT visit in the hospital improves my mood
- I am glad we have AAT at the hospital
- The presence of the AAT program helps to keep me working at Edward

As seen below, the attitude toward AAT was very positive for current nurses, PCTs and other clinicians. Particularly impressive is the finding that 64.5% of RNs agree or strongly agree that the AAT program helps to keep them working at Edward.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Seeing an AAT visit in the hospital improves my mood				
RN	42 (67.7%)	20 (32.3%)	0	0
PCT	43 (79.6%)	9 (16.7%)	2 (3.7%)	0

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Other	18 (62.1%)	9 (31.0%)	1 (3.4%)	1 (3.4%)

I am glad we have AAT at the hospital

RN	49 (79.0%)	13 (21.0%)	0	0
PCT	45 (83.3%)	7 (13.0%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.9%)
Other	22 (75.9%)	5 (17.2%)	1 (3.4%)	1 (3.4%)

The presence of the AAT program helps to keep me working at Edward

RN	22 (35.5%)	18 (29.0%)	9 (14.5%)	1 (1.6%)
PCT	14 (25.9%)	29 (53.7%)	4 (7.4%)	0
Other	10 (34.5%)	9 (31.0%)	5 (17.2%)	2 (6.9%)

We compared the responses for each of the three questions to key demographic variables, including position, unit, length of time at Edward, length of time in health care, hours worked per week, and the presence of a pet at home. Only one item reached statistical significance. When compared to those without a pet, those with a pet at home were much more likely to agree that seeing an AAT visit improves their moods ($p=.008$).

Over 82% of the new employees were familiar with the Animal Assisted Therapy program. New employees were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the statement: “the presence of the Animal Assisted Therapy program at Edward Hospital influenced my decision to choose employment at Edward.” Of those who were aware of the AAT program, nearly 45% indicated that AAT influenced their decision to work at Edward; 13.4% strongly agreed and 30.8% agreed with the statement.

While this study relies on self report, it does suggest that the presence of an AAT program may impact recruitment and retention, even in this time of growing staff shortages.