

# What about nurses and animal assisted interventions?

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## Introduction

In several medical settings, animal assisted interventions (AAI) are implemented to increase the wellbeing of patients. AAI programs include for example regular visits of dogs to elderly patients in order to diminish feelings of depression. The suggested clinical effectiveness of AAI on depression, anxiety, stress and pain in institutions for elderly, psychiatric institutions and institutions of healthcare for children has already received researchers' attention (\*). However, little is known about the part caregivers may play in facilitating these programmes. What about their tasks in AAI, their attitude towards and their knowledge about AAI?



## Methods

A multidisciplinary (pharmacist, nurse, psychologist, midwife, ethologist and occupational therapist) designed questionnaire was distributed among caregivers in three Belgian hospitals on the children's, psychiatric, geriatric, neurologic, oncologic and palliative ward. Respondents' attitude toward AAI and their knowledge of AAI was explored, as well as their motivation and needs for using AAI in a clinical setting. The total response rate was 58% (259/450).

<http://www.ilfont.it/attualita/lifestyle-diventare-operatore-in-pet-therapy-via-alcuni-corsi-25265/>

## Results

### Attitude

➤ 80% considered AAI as providing added value for increasing the patients' feeling of wellbeing.

➤ Per respondent, an overall value score for AAI was calculated based on the answers he/she gave to statements regarding the added value of AAI in various situations. The overall value score was significantly higher for caregivers with pets and those who previously acquired knowledge of, or experience in AAI.

➤ 238 participants ranked several activities in clinical settings according to their value for increasing patients' wellbeing (figure 1). Having conversation with volunteers or psychologists scored best. 33.2% rated this activity as the most valuable. Animal visits (of their own pet or of an AAI-animal) scored second best with 21.8%.

### Experience

➤ 17.0% had previous experience with AAI, mainly in palliative wards in hospitals and elderly homes, predominantly with dogs.

### Knowledge

➤ 59.5% didn't have any knowledge about AAI, 33.6% read about it and only 6.9% had followed training programs which were mainly workshops organized by a training facility for assistance dogs (figure 2).

➤ 75.8% agreed with the statement that educating staff about animal behavior is mandatory when implementing AAI. 63.7% specifically agreed they felt the need for receiving information regarding animal behavior in order to help during AAI-sessions.

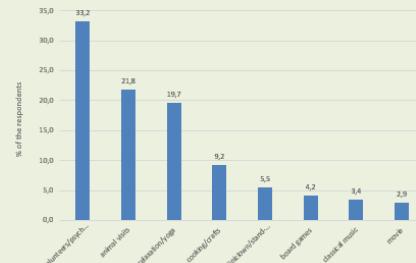


Figure 1: For each activity, % of respondents who gave the highest rank to the activity.

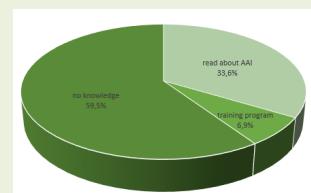


Figure 2: Respondents' knowledge about AAI

## Conclusion

Half of the caregivers is willing to participate in AAI and considered their role herein as mainly supportive and 64% expressed the need for education about AAI. Offering them educational programs on AAI could facilitate implementations of AAI in clinical settings.

The aim of the ZorgBeest project is to support clinical settings in implementing AAI. By offering e.g. guidelines and education for caregivers we strive at giving high quality scientific advice to maximize the potential of AAI. This can only be achieved by maximising the wellbeing of all parties involved, humans as well as animals.

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\* (Lasa et al., 2015; Maujean et al., 2015; Maber-Aleksandrowicz et al., 2016; Bert et al., 2016)