DEVELOPING A SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM IN A HEALTH CARE FACILITY: BENEFITS TO ADULT LEARNERS AND TO THE COMMUNITY

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Class: HEA 350 SL
Residential and Long-term Care

- Set up as Service Learning class
- 12 weeks duration (2x week)
- 14 students – groups of 3 or 4 (4 groups)
- Visitation of patients
  - Group 1 – 1st floor - Wing A
  - Group 2 – 1st floor - Wing B
  - Group 3 – 2nd floor – Wing A
  - Group 4 – 2nd floor – Wing B
- 6 visits to nursing home (4 visits with dog)
Why This Program Pilot?

- Benefits for Adult Learners
- Benefits of Dog Therapy
- Needs of Nursing Home
- Student Engagement in Program
- Patient Participation
Program Limitations

- Adult learners were hands on with the therapy dog but not with the patients for safety reasons.
- Much of the assessment was anecdotal and based on small numbers of patients (n=12).
- Privacy regulations limited access to health information so some of final assessment and decision for implementation was determined by the nursing home staff.
- Time of day affected some patient alertness and scheduling conflicts.
- Some patients “opted out” so selection was voluntary, not random.
Why Use a trained Therapy Dog:

- Studies show that animals:
  - help people overcome isolation, develop trust, and increase their confidence (Smokay, 2003).
  - have a positive effect on the reduction of stress (Siegel, 1990; Voelker, 1995) blood pressure, and the improvement of morale (Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980).
  - have been important in the spiritual and secular lives of human beings, and their therapeutic value has been observed for many years (Connor & Miller, 2000).

Nursing home patients who reported a high level of voluntary contact with pets had lower scores for loneliness than those who reported a low level of contact (Banks & Banks, 2002).
Program Components

1. Understanding Patient Needs
2. Working with DASH (Trained Therapy Dog)
3. Creating an Activity Planning for Residents
4. Assessing and Adapting Plan for Patients
Program Component #1

- **Understanding Patient Needs:**
  - Students better able to assess with dog.
  - More patients were receptive to working with student and animal together.
  - Patients excited to participate
Program Component #2

- Working with DASH
  - Students trained to handle dog (basic commands)
  - Understanding of who is in charge
  - Recognizing when to reward
  - Knowing role as dog interacts with the patients
  - Being mindful of patient reactions with dog (safety boundaries).
Program Component #3

- Creating an Activity Plan
  - Determining patient ability and participation willingness
  - Creating an activity plan for the facility (1 month plan)
  - Understanding when times are best for each activity (meals, family visits, PT, OT, staff availability, etc)
  - Several kinds of engagements (bowling, pancakes, stickers, music, etc.)
  - Presenting plan to nursing facility
Program Component #4

- Assessing and Adapting Plan for Patients
  - Adapting activities in plan for individual patients
  - Presenting activities with adaptations and rationale for each adaptation based on patient assessment of ability
  - Nursing home feedback based on assessment (given privacy/confidentiality limitations)
Patient Issues for Assessment by Student

- Culture/language
- Fear of dog/stress
- Allergies
- Mental/cognitive state
- Physical capability
- Hearing impairment
- Balance
- Voluntary participation
Student issues with handling dog:

- Fear of Dogs
- Learning Commands
- Taking Charge
- Mutual Respect and Trust
- Rules: Nibbling, licking, barking, drooling, panting, jumping, recognizing stress in the dog, feeding and cookies.
Initial Assessment

- Initial Observations
  - Assessment of student patient interaction
  - Assessment of student dog interaction
  - Verbal feedback provided to students by me and by student group

- Follow-up observations
  - Assessment of student groups (3-4 students) with patients and dog
Formative Assessment

- Student knowledge of skills and learning gaps
- Dog interaction with students (appropriateness, fears, in-charge)
- Patient Interaction (communication, assessment of needs and abilities)
- Verbal feedback – strengths, challenges, next steps, observation of other group members)
Summative Assessment

- Completed at end of unit of study (30% of grade)
- Based on:
  - Activity plan – is the plan implementable
  - Activity plan – adaptations realistic for patients
- Reviewed by nursing home activity director, administrator and Professor – evaluated for ability to implement plan and correct adaptations for patients in each group
- Verbal feedback after oral presentations
- Written feedback and grades after completion of oral presentation and written paper.
Feedback from Adult Learners

- Excited about program and recommend continuation.
- Evaluation reflected learning and increase confidence
- Service learning provided something additional for resume as students began seeking jobs


Stanley- Hermanns, M., & Miller, J. (2002). Animal-assisted therapy: Domestic animals aren't merely pets. To some, they can be healers. American Journal of Nursing, 102(10), 69-76.