Canine-Assisted Therapy for Children With ADHD: Preliminary Findings From The Positive Assertive Cooperative Kids Study. (abstract below)

Commentary by Dr. Margaret Weiss*:
Why this article was chosen: Those who have worked with me know that in the 25 years I have worked with patients with ADHD there has always been a Dr. Dog at my side. I often ask children why their parents brought them to a veterinarian. The dog has always been trained to go out and get the patients and then has the sensitivity in any family and group to cuddle the person hurting at that time. What has always amazed me however is that the same disruptive child in the playground melts into such a patient, kind, and gentle person when with an animal. The change in demeanour is truly remarkable: calm, quiet, engaged. I have no idea why or what this tells us about ADHD, but when parents observe it is not just the child that is soothed. They see a child whom they can believe in for the future. Every child asks me - "does he just do this with me?", and of course the answer is yes, only you.

Canine-Assisted Therapy for Children With ADHD: Preliminary Findings From The Positive Assertive Cooperative Kids Study.

Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study was to provide preliminary findings from an ongoing randomized clinical trial using a canine-assisted intervention (CAI) for 24 children with ADHD. Method: Project Positive Assertive Cooperative Kids (P.A.C.K.) was designed to study a 12-week cognitive-behavioral intervention delivered with or without CAI. Children were randomly assigned to group therapy with or without CAI. Parents of children in both groups simultaneously participated in weekly parent group therapy sessions.

Results: Across both treatment groups, parents reported improvements in children's social skills, prosocial behaviors, and problematic behaviors. In both groups, the severity of ADHD symptoms declined during the course of treatment; however, children who received the CAI model exhibited greater reductions in the severity of ADHD symptoms than did children who received cognitive-behavioral therapy without CAI.

Conclusion: Results suggest that CAI offers a novel therapeutic strategy that may enhance cognitive-behavioral interventions for children with ADHD.

* Abstracts are selected for their clinical relevance by Dr. Margaret Weiss MD PhD FRCP, Weiss Clinic for ADHD Care, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC. Her commentary reflects her own opinion, is not approved, or necessarily representative, of the opinion of the CADDRA board.