Reviewer’s report

Title: Animal-Assisted Therapy at a University Center for Palliative Medicine - a Retrospective Qualitative and Quantitative Observational Study

Version: 0 Date: 20 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Mary Acri

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study, and one that moves the field of AAT forward. However, there are several major issues to consider/respond to before this manuscript is suitable for publication.

1. There is, actually, work done on this topic with AAT. Engelman (2013) is one such study. I would review this literature and a rationale as to why your research is needed within this context.

2. It's not clear why AAT would be beneficial to individuals in palliative care (first paragraph) - what is it about the animal that is therapeutic? Is there a theory that can guide this statement?

3. Why did Freud have his dog with him? This matters because was it for the patient or for him? If not for the patient, then I would remove this.

4. What are the beneficial effects for humans re: their interaction with animals in general, and then dogs in particular?

5. What is the dog doing in AAT...is it structured in any way?

6. What framework is used for the intervention-I understand there are four parts of the structure (stages), but what strategies/interventions are used?

7. Unclear that this was a feasibility study, and usually feasibility pertains to "can it be done" not what the benefits were of the particular intervention.

8. Given the interest in symptom reduction, how did AAT address this?

9. Content re: structure of AAT would be better served in the methods, not the discussion.

10. Another limitation of this study is that the findings are based on the perceptions of the handlers; may not be what actually occurred.

11. I would attend to grammar and edit thoroughly.

- Qualitative/quantitative (mixed methods)
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?
6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal