Pet therapy is a popular form of alternative therapy for seniors. The physical, mental, and emotional benefits of interaction with animals have been well documented. However, there are several variants of pet therapy and not all of them are the best choices for everyone. Learning about therapeutic options helps seniors and their families decide what is most suitable for the different rehabilitation needs of each person. Individuals interested in participating in pet therapy should first consult a therapist familiar with the different forms of pet therapy to determine which one would fit them best.

Kittens are excellent therapy animals.

**Pet Therapy Variations**

Each type of animal-oriented therapy delivers different benefits according to an individual’s needs and situation.

- **Visitation Therapy**: This is the most familiar type of animal therapy and involves animals – typically cats or dogs – being brought to hospitals, nursing homes, or care centers to visit with residents and patients. Residents get the loving attention of an animal without getting involved in the necessary care requirements. This is particularly suitable for facilities where pets are not permitted.

- **Ownership Therapy**: Pets can be as valuable as a prescription, and alternative therapy practices often encourage owning pets for the mental and emotional benefits. Individuals interested in pet ownership, however, should carefully consider the needs and requirements of the animal and whether the particular animal is right for them.

- **Animal-Assisted Therapy**: This is a more intensive type of therapy where patients in need of extreme rehabilitation are paired with particularly sensitive animals – such as, dolphins or horses. Interacting with such animals has been found to build confidence as well as refine physical skills.

**Benefits of Pet Therapy**

The benefits of an animal-human bond have been documented for centuries, and bonds developed during therapy can be strong and positive. The relationship between a therapy animal and a patient, however, can have greater benefits than simple companionship: there are also physical, emotional, and mental benefits to this type of treatment.

*continued on p. 2*
There are issues unique to individuals with memory changes and to their family members. We are trying to learn how to better address these issues by developing new services and providing support groups that meet the needs of individuals with memory problems and their families. We are involved in ongoing development of support groups to achieve these goals. Currently the following groups are available at our center:

Caregivers Support Group
This is a small group designed to provide educational information and answers to individual questions and concerns of caregivers. It also provides a network to offer support and guidance. Since this is a small group we do request regular attendance to the meetings. The group meets on the 2nd Friday of each month from 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. If you are interested in the group or would like additional information, please contact Helen Davies, MS, APRN, BC at (650) 858-3915.

Mild Cognitive Impairment Group
This group is designed for individuals with a diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment (symptoms not meeting criteria for dementia) and their family members or friends. This group focuses on 1) education, 2) communication, 3) management, and 4) psychosocial concerns. The group meets bi-monthly on Wednesdays from 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. For further information, please contact Helen Davies at (650) 858-3915.

Educational Seminars
These are monthly informational/educational seminars given by professional staff addressing a variety of topics pertinent to memory loss and caregiver issues. These seminars are open to all participants and their caregivers and will include a question-and-answer session. Seminars meet on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 10-11 a.m. For further information, please contact Helen Davies at (650) 858-3915.

All groups meet at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System 3801 Miranda Ave., Bldg. 6, 2nd floor Conference Room (room C258) Palo Alto, CA 94304

For more information, please call (650) 858-3915 or (650) 493-5000, 1,1 x65051 http://svalz.stanford.edu/groups.html

Physical
The physical health benefits of animal therapy depend on which type of therapy is practiced and the individual’s situation and needs. They include:

- Increased mobility from brushing, petting, and walking an animal.
- Enhancing physical skills through intensive therapy, such as riding horses or swimming.
- Increased exercise from caring for the demands of a pet.
- Lowered blood pressure and reduced stress from the caring nature of the nonjudgmental relationship.

Emotional
Animals can provide seniors not only with companionship, but also with other emotional benefits such as:

- A sense of caring and concern as many animals instinctively nurture ailing humans.
- Increased self esteem as seniors find they can care for the pet and that the animal enjoys seeing them.
- Decreased anxiety and depression by forming a nurturing bond with an animal.
- Reduced loneliness by caring for and spending time with an animal.
- Increased social interaction with other patients or animal handlers.
- Higher comfort levels with other family members who can use the animal rather than the illness or disability as a focal point for discussion.

Mental
Animal therapy also can provide mental benefits to patients, including:

- Mental stimulation by comparing their therapy animal to other pets.
- Daily goals and structure based on care needs for the animal.
- Mental stimulation through contact with conversation with animal handlers or playing with the animal.
**Spotlight: Ansgar Furst, PhD**

Director, Neuroimaging Laboratory at the War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC). Research scientist at the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center (ACRC)

Dr. Ansgar Furst, a native German and former airforce officer, joined the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center (ACRC) in March of this year. His expertise in neuroimaging of Alzheimer’s disease adds to the skill set of the already distinguished group of researchers at the ACRC. Ansgar received his PhD in England, studying under Professors Graham Hitch and Alan Baddeley, both leaders in short-term memory research. After arriving in the US he discovered a passion for neuroimaging during his post-doctoral training at the Henry H. Wheeler Brain Imaging Center at UC Berkeley. His initial training was primarily focused on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) research. He was then offered the opportunity of working on a new positron emission tomography (PET) amyloid tracer under the mentorship of Professor William Jagust, a renowned leader in imaging of Alzheimer’s disease. The tracer, called Pittsburgh compound-B (PiB) constitutes a breakthrough in diagnostic imaging as it allows the imaging of beta-amyloid plaques (one of the hallmarks of Alzheimer’s disease) through a PET brain scan. Prior to the availability of the tracer these plaques could only be found at autopsy – far too late for therapies to be of any use. With his close collaborator, Dr. Gil Rabinovici at UC San Francisco, Ansgar published some of the first papers showing the usefulness of PiB in distinguishing Alzheimer’s disease from other common neurodegenerative diseases. These papers received praise from the American Academy of Neurology (scientific highlight and best paper) and awards from the Alzheimer’s Association (2 Kathryn Grupe awards). Angar is currently also working on studies of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in order to better serve the needs of our veterans.

In his free time Ansgar coordinates and participates in the hospital visitation program of the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSA) at the VA Palo Alto and also teaches Tai Chi in Willow Glen (San Jose). Ansgar is the proud father of two sons, aged 5 years and 20 months. He and his wife Isabelle (a French native) are raising their boys in a tri-lingual environment. Quality time with his family is one of his greatest pleasures.

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**Can My Animal Help?**

Even people who do not need of pet therapy themselves can benefit from being involved in as volunteers, either with their own pets or animals from shelters. Many types of animals are welcomed into therapy programs. Dogs and cats are the most common participants. Pot-bellied pigs, rabbits, and birds can also be used for therapy, though wild animals with uncertain temperaments such as ferrets and lizards do not typically make suitable therapy animals.

Any animal that is considered for pet therapy should exhibit certain characteristics, including an easygoing, amiable nature, acceptance of strangers and new environments, and a generally friendliness and willingness to be petted and handled for long periods. Pets must also be able to respond to basic obedience commands. Both the pets and their owners or handlers must usually attend workshops or other training sessions before participating in a therapy program.

**For More Information**

For more information about pet therapy programs, contact alternative therapists or visit the official website of the Delta Society, www.deltasociety.org, which has been promoting the benefits of the human-animal bond since the society was founded in 1977.

Information for this article from: http://seniors.lovetoknow.com/Pet_Therapy  
Article by Gerald Georgette, RN
RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Memory in Older Adults

This project is designed to look at how mood and worry affect memory in older adults. Participation involves 4 hours of testing now and again one year later. You may learn more about your memory. Each testing session pays $40 -- a total of $80 for completing both testing sessions (now and a year later).

You may be able to participate if:
• You are 65 and older.
• You have not been diagnosed with dementia.

To sign up for this study,
Contact: Sherry Beaudreau
(650) 493-5000 ext. 64119

ICARA study

The ICARA (Investigational Clinical Amyloid Research in Alzheimer’s) Study is now under way to explore a possible new investigational treatment for Alzheimer’s disease. In addition to receiving study-related physical exams and laboratory tests at no charge, participants may receive study medication and will be monitored by a medical team, including a study coordinator and a physician.

You may be able to participate in the ICARA study if:
• You are 50 to 88 years old
• You have a diagnosis of probable Alzheimer’s disease
• You have a study partner- a friend or relative who can accompany you to all clinic visits.

To sign up for this study
Contact: Ansgar or Peter
(650) 852-3233

Citalopram for Agitation in Alzheimer’s Disease (CitAD)

The goal of the CitAD study is to see if a medication called Citalopram (Celexa) is helpful to people experiencing memory problems and anxiety. Benefits include a review of current medications by the study physicians, psycho-social support from a gero-psychologist for the care partner, and a 24-hour help line.

You may be able to participate in the CitAD study if:
• You are over 50 years old
• You have a diagnosis of probable Alzheimer’s disease, and are experiencing some anxiety
• You have a study partner- a friend or relative who can accompany you to all clinic visits.

To sign up for this study
Contact: Jeff or Ellen
(650) 496-2578
RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Longitudinal Sleep Study

This observational study is designed to look at sleep/wake patterns in persons with memory problems over the course of time. Once a year, this study will collect a 1 week record of your sleep in your own home. No treatment is involved.

You may be able to participate if:
  • You are 55 years or older
  • You have memory impairment or dementia
  • You live at home with a caregiver/study partner

To sign up for this study
Contact: Deryl Wicks
(650) 493-5000, ext. 64052

Memory Screening

This project is developing an approach to screen for memory problems in group sessions.

Each screening session:
  • Begins with a brief talk on memory & aging
  • Involves simple memory games many enjoy
  • Reviews your results and concerns with staff

Please call for the next Memory Screening Session or join us on National Memory Screening Day, Tuesday, November 16, 2010.

The Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) is a nationwide study with the goal of determining whether imaging of the brain (through MRI, PET and amyloid imaging scans) can help predict and monitor the progression of mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and Alzheimer’s disease. In addition to neuroimaging, the study will collect and test blood and cerebral spinal fluid to determine if biomarkers can contribute to disease prediction and monitoring.

You may be able to participate if:
  • You are between 55 and 90 years of age
  • You are in general good health but with memory concerns
  • You have a study partner - a friend or relative who can accompany you to all clinic visits.

To sign up for this study
Contact: Michelle Farrell
(650) 849-0491
RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Navigation Study

We are interested in navigation abilities in cognitively healthy adults from the general population. We will be using memory tasks involving objects and words, including a computer game that asks you to “drive” around a town as a taxi driver. Your participation will help us develop memory tasks that can be used in future studies of brain imaging.

You may be able to participate if:
- You are 45 to 75 years old
- You have no particular memory problems
- You have no prior stroke, mental illness, major depression or other neurological disorders
- You have prior experience using a computer

To sign up for this study
Contact: Maheen Adamson
(650) 493-5000 1,1, ext. 62179

Psychosocial Factors in AD Progression Study

This study investigates the use of various support services among patients and their caregivers. Services include: patient and caregiver support groups, adult day care, overnight respite care, and family members for respite. The study looks at whether participation in these services slows the rate of decline and delays time to institutionalization.

You may be able to participate if:
- You have a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease
- You are community-dwelling (i.e. not residing in a nursing home)
- You have a caregiver who is willing to provide information semi-annually

To sign up for this study
Contact: Helen Davies
(650) 493-5000 1,1, ext. 65051

Medication Assessment Study

This observational study provides detailed diagnostic assessments and follow-ups to patients with memory complaints. The goal of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-Alzheimer’s medications. The patient’s treatment regimens are determined by their individual physician according to his or her usual criteria. You need not be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease or taking an anti-Alzheimer’s medication to participate.

You may be able to participate if:
- You have a memory complaint
- You are community-dwelling (i.e. not residing in a nursing home)
- You have a study partner who is willing to provide information for a baseline visit and possibly for subsequent annual visits

To sign up for this study
Contact: Helen Davies
(650) 493-5000 1,1, ext. 65051
RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a support group as a means of improving quality of life and relationship as well as alleviate symptoms of depression. Support group sessions provide information, emotional support and socialization.

You may be able to participate if:

- You have Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)
- You have a study partner- a friend or relative who can accompany you to all clinic visits.

Sessions are held at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.
Co-sponsored by the Stanford/VA California Alzheimer’s Center and the Alzheimer’s Association.

Why Should You Participate in Research?

1) To Help Develop Future Treatments - Many studies offer participants a chance to help in the development of the next generation of treatments for medical conditions, diseases, and disorders. As these treatments are under investigation and not yet available to the public, study participants are carefully monitored by the study’s research team to evaluate how safe and effective these new treatments are. Participant feedback is essential in helping the study’s team determine this. Without the help of research participants, it would not be possible to learn if new treatments are safe or effective enough to be widely distributed.

2) Safety Comes First - Research studies must demonstrate that the risks of participating in a study do not outweigh the potential benefits that the study might produce. All research studies at Stanford or the VA Palo Alto Health Care System are evaluated by a number of reviewers to make sure they meet this standard. Approval is given by a governing body, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), that makes sure all research is conducted in a safe and ethical way. Furthermore, every research participant must sign a consent form that informs them of all the known risks of participating in a given study. Lastly, research personnel are required to inform all participants of any new risks of participation that are discovered during the course of a study.

3) Your Information is Confidential - All research at Stanford or the VA requires rigorous safe-keeping of all information related to a participant’s study involvement. First, we are required to keep all information collected for a study under double lock and key. This means surveys, questionnaires, or any other piece of information gathered during a study must be kept in a locked file cabinet inside a locked room. Only members of the study team have access to the keys. Second, we are required to remove all personal identifiers from information we collect. Upon entrance into a study, participants are given a unique study ID number and all information collected is only collected under that ID number. Only a few people within the study have the ability to match the participant’s names with their ID numbers. Lastly, research personnel are not allowed to use participant’s names while corresponding by email. This ensures that no hackers (or snoopy people in general) can break this promise of confidentiality.

4) If You Don’t Do It, Nobody Will - If everyone assumed that someone else would step forward to participate in an experimental study, then we would have no participants, and there would be no way to advance our knowledge and develop new treatments. “Diffusion of Responsibility” is a complex social phenomenon that occurs when individuals assume someone else will take care of a problem, and in the end nothing gets done. Don’t assume others will participate in a study you may qualify for. Pick up the phone and call today!

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) Support Group

To sign up
Contact: Judy Filippoff
Alzheimer’s Association
1-800-272-3900
Physicians and researchers around the world are gaining a better understanding of the causes, and possible preventions of Alzheimer’s disease. However, they are constantly faced with new obstacles that quell their efforts to fully understand this pervasive disease. Perhaps the most salient among those obstacles is a lack of funding to conduct the many critical research projects that will shed light on this disease. With limited resources, research in this area will only take our knowledge of this disease so far. With an estimated 5.3 million people diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, 172 billion dollars in annual costs, nearly 11 million unpaid caregivers (most often the family members of those with the disease), and the baby boomer generation quickly approaching older adulthood, the lack of funding into maintenance, prevention, and cures for this disease is alarming.

Fortunately, there are many people and organizations that recognize the imperative need to fund new research in this area. The Alzheimer’s Association contributes more money to Alzheimer’s research than any other private, nonprofit organization in the world. Currently, funding from the Alzheimer’s Association is supporting a vast array of research projects including studies of brain imaging, genetics, new treatments, and creating better diagnostic criteria for the disease. The Alzheimer’s Association spends 72 percent of their total annual expenses directly on support, care, research, and awareness and advocacy activities. The national Memory Walk circuit has become a staple for raising money to fulfill their mission of advancing Alzheimer’s research, providing care and support for all those affected, and reducing the risk of all forms of dementia by promoting brain health. Since 1989, the Memory Walk has raised more than 300 million dollars for this cause. The Memory Walk is a community event that brings together families, friends, and co-workers as they walk to bring an end to Alzheimer’s. With 600 walk locations nationwide, this is truly a one-of-a-kind event.

For the past several years the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center has participated in these memory walks by forming a team and raising money. This year our team will have many walkers in the Silicon Valley Memory walk in San Jose. This walk is on Saturday, September 25th, beginning at 10:00am at Arena Green in downtown San Jose across from the HP Pavilion. Walkers may choose between completing a 1 mile, or 3 mile walk.

If you would like to be a part of this special event, there are several ways you can get involved.

The first way is to help us reach our fundraising goal by donating money to our team web page, found at http://memorywalk.kintera.org/sv10/acrc. Once on our team page, simply click on the “General Team Donation” link and follow the website’s instructions.

The second way to get involved is to join our team and be a walker with us. To do this, go to our team’s web page, found at http://memorywalk.kintera.org/sv10/acrc, and click on the “join our team” link found underneath our team name at the top of the page. Everyone is welcome to join our team and help us find sponsors to donate money.

The last way to help is to start a team of your own and get all of your family, friends, and co-workers to join your team and help raise money. Just start a team of your own, simply go to http://www.alz.org/memorywalk/ and click on the “sign up” link. Look for San Jose, or Silicon Valley to find the local Memory Walk.

If you would like more information about the Alzheimer’s Association or the memory walk fundraiser, please visit their website at http://alz.org. And remember, by donating to this event, you are helping fight a global problem.

Information for this article was provided by http://alz.org. Article by: Jeff Newell
The Skinny on Support Groups

Have you or someone you care about been faced with a difficult situation, such as an illness or major life changes? Sometimes situations can push us beyond what our normal coping strategies can handle, leaving us feeling worried, sad, unsure, isolated, or particularly stressed out. These are common reactions, but you don’t have to work through these difficult emotions on your own. Many people find support groups to be a particularly helpful tool in distressful times.

What is a support group? Support groups serve as a forum for people facing a similar problem to come together and share their experiences or provide advice. Group members typically provide emotional and moral support to each other as well as tips on how to handle delicate or difficult situations. Support groups vary in their structure and format. Some groups are very informal and may be lead by group members while others are lead by professionals such as psychologists, nurses, or social workers. The focal point of support groups can be quite varied and depends on the needs of the group members. For example, some groups are structured and educational in nature, and may invite speakers on relevant topics. Alternatively, other groups are focused on providing emotional support and comfort. The content of groups is frequently decided by the group members. There are a growing number of telephone and online support groups, that may be ideal for those who aren’t able to travel due to caregiving responsibilities, medical problems, or transportation issues.

So where do you find a support group? A good place to start is with your healthcare provider, whether that be a doctor, nurse, psychologist, chaplain or social worker. They may know of local support groups or be able to point you in the right direction towards finding one. Another good source is advertisements in newsletters. Local or national organizations focused on a disease, illness, or condition may also have information about support groups.

The Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center sponsors a research study of support groups for persons with Mild Cognitive Impairment and their care partners. This study will examine the effectiveness of a support group as a means of improving quality of life and relationship as well as alleviate symptoms of depression. This group meets twice a month at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. For more information about the group, please contact Judy Filippoff at the Alzheimer’s Association at 1-800-272-3900.

Make a difference: Help end Alzheimer’s Disease!

A contribution to the Aging Clinical Research Center is a gift to future generations in our quest to cure Alzheimer’s disease. Your generous support ensures that the Center continues to conduct top-quality clinical research to improve treatment options and to provide education and support for patients and families. With your help, our clinical researchers investigate the causes of memory loss and neurodegeneration, develop and test better treatments for Alzheimer’s disease, and share these discoveries with the local community and with scientists around the world.

Tax-deductible contributions can be made by check, payable to: Stanford University

Please indicate Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center in the memo line.

Mail your contributions to:
Jerome Yesavage, MD, Director
Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center
3801 Miranda Avenue (151Y)
Palo Alto, CA 94304

Gifts may be made in honor of someone’s special occasion or in memory of someone who has passed away. Please provide the name of the person you wish to honor, as well as the name and address of anyone whom you wish to receive an acknowledgement of the gift.

For additional information about the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center and opportunities, or to contribute, call (650) 852-3287. All donations are tax-deductible.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Memory Walk
When: Saturday, September 25, 2010, beginning at 10am
Where: Arena Green in downtown San Jose across from the HP Pavilion.
See article on page 8 for details. Join the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center Team at http://memorywalk.kintera.org/sv10/acrc

Circle of Care Conference
When: Saturday, October 30, 2010, 9am to 4:15pm (with registration opening at 8am)
Where: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Foster City, CA
Register at: http://edconference.kintera.org/COC2010

Speakers this year include John Shen, PhD on “A Little Psychology Can Help: A Primer on Developing Psychological Competency in Alzheimer’s Care “; Maria Carrillo, PhD on “The Cutting Edge of Alzheimer's Research: The Search for Answers”; David Coon, PhD on “Taking Care of the Caregiver”, as well as panel discussions on Caregiving Challenges and Strategies.

National Memory Screening Day
When: Tuesday, November 16, 2010, 10am-11:30am
Where: VA Palo Alto Health Care System, 3801 Miranda Avenue, Palo Alto, CA in Building 5, 4th floor conference room.

National Memory Screening Day is part of a national effort to promote early detection of Alzheimer's disease and related illnesses, and to encourage appropriate intervention, including medical treatments, social services and other resources. Memory screenings are a significant first step toward early diagnosis. To register for a memory screening at the Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center, call (650) 852-3287.

Stanford/VA Aging Clinical Research Center
3801 Miranda Ave. (151Y)
Palo Alto, CA 94304
650-852-3287

Visit us on the web:
Aging Clinical Research Center (ACRC): http://alzheimer.stanford.edu
Stanford/VA California Alzheimer’s Center: http://svalz.stanford.edu
Sierra-Pacific MIRECC: http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn21/

To add or remove your name from our mailing list, call (650) 852-3287 or visit the ACRC web site.

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