

# The Therapeutic Use of Canines in Medicine and Psychiatry



Photo from VETDOGS



Photo from Dr. Ritchie at Walter Reed

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# Outline

- Background on history and activities
- Identify programs that utilize dogs in therapy or activities as a supplement to traditional rehabilitation
- Dogs and PTSD
- Issues
- Way ahead



Photo from  
NEADs

# HISTORY (continued)

**1986** – Numerous HAB programs (AAA) were implemented throughout the DOD. Today, these programs are operated by volunteer groups with some VC support

**1995** - Service dog training center established at Fort Knox, KY

**1995** - The Journal of American Medical Association outlined benefits of ATT at healthcare facilities in Chicago.

**Today** – Animal Assisted Activities and Animal Assisted Therapy are offered in a variety of settings such as nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, developmental centers, acute care facilities, psychiatric centers, hospices and correctional institutions.

Photo from VETDOGS



# Canine Related Activities

- Combat and operational stress control animal assisted therapy
- Army family action plan
  - “Fund service dogs for wounded warriors”
- December 2009 Summit
  - Fort Myers Officer’s Club
  - Stakeholders
- Policy revisions
  - Human animal bond
  - In theater animal assisted therapy
  - CONUS use in hospital facilities
- DCOE/NICOE interest



# AVMA

## DEFINITIONS :

- ***Animal assisted activities (AAA)*** provide opportunities for motivation, education or recreation to enhance quality of life. Animal assisted activities are delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals or volunteers in association with animals that meet specific criteria.
- ***Animal assisted therapy (AAT)*** is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Animal assisted therapy is delivered and/or directed by health or human service providers working within the scope of their profession. Animal assisted therapy is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional or cognitive function. Animal assisted therapy is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. The process is documented and evaluated.

# Combat Stress Therapy Dog

## Animal Assisted Therapy/Activities

- 212<sup>th</sup> Med Det COSC
  - “Zeke has been on combat logistics patrols with me to Al Kisik and on a BlackHawk to QWest. We take him with us on walkabouts, group sessions and presentations. Units also call for us to bring Zeke to visit their units. At Al Kisik we visited a MiTT (Military Transition Team). I tend to use Zeke as an icebreaker during our walkabouts. Zeke makes it easy to approach and talk to soldiers that otherwise would not want to interact with someone from the CSC.”

CPT David Norris, OT, OIC Fitness Team, 212<sup>th</sup> CSC.

# 212<sup>th</sup> CSC Therapy Dog SFC Zeke



Photo courtesy of 212<sup>th</sup> CSC

# Combat Stress Therapy Dog

## Animal Assisted Therapy/Activities

- 212<sup>th</sup> Med Det COSC
  - “A patient in our waiting room was crying and Zeke walked in on his own and puts his head on her lap. This patient later reported to us that Zeke helped her feel calm and helped distract her from her thoughts.” CPT David Norris, OT, OIC Fitness Team, 212<sup>th</sup> CSC.
  - 212<sup>th</sup> MED DET (CSC) Policy Letter 2-14: Care of Therapy Dogs, Dec 09
    - TB MED 4. DoD Human-Animal Bond Principles and Guidelines , June 03
    - America’s VET DOGS Veteran’s K-9 Corps SOP for Military Therapy Dogs
  - Research

# 212<sup>th</sup> CSC SFC Zeke



Photos from 212<sup>th</sup> CSC

# Service Dogs

Three major organizations providing dogs to vets

- VETDOGS
  - Seeing Eye Dog Background
  - Long Island
  - Working with Walter Reed
- New England Assistance Dogs (NEADS)
  - Hearing disability tradition
  - Canines for combat veterans
- Canine Companions for Independence (CCI)
  - 5 training sites
  - Paws for Purple Hearts
  - Bergin University



Photos from CCI

# Selected Dog Programs

Supplement Traditional Rehabilitation/Therapy Programs

- Animal assisted activities
- Animal Assisted therapy
- Specialized facility canines
- Military therapy dogs
  - Combat stress units
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center Warrior transition battalion work and education programs
  - Service dog training
    - Paws for Purple Hearts
  - Dog behavior/obedience and care training
    - Washington Humane Society



Photo from CCI

# Animal Assisted Activities

Socializing, interacting, comforting patients and family.

- Walter Reed Army Medical Center (MATC OT/PT)
  - Animal assisted activity “Therapy Dog Program”
  - Animal visitation program – PAL/Red Cross





Photo Courtesy of OT Walter Reed

WRAMC  
Animal assisted therapy  
(specialized service  
dog)  
“Specialized Facility  
Canines”



Photo Courtesy of OT Walter Reed

# Fort Gordon AAT/AAA



Photo from Ft Gordon  
OT

# Walter Reed Army Medical Center Warrior Transition Battalion Work and Education Program

- Service Dog Training Program (Paws for Purple Hearts)
  - WTs with PTSD train service dogs
  - Benefits
    - Human-animal bond
    - Reduction of PTSD symptoms
    - Learned skills/interest
    - Safe/cost reducing (non pharmaceutical)
    - Warrior ethos – helping a fellow veteran
    - Delivery of a newly trained service dog
  - Memorandum of Agreement with Bergin University, Assist Dog Institute, January 09

- Photo from Walter Reed



# Paws for Purple Hearts

- Service dogs are specially trained to assist veterans who have physical and/or psychological injuries.
- Assist veterans with activities of daily living
  - Opening doors
  - Retrieving dropped items
  - Pulling wheelchairs
  - Managing crowds
  - Regulating emotional states



Photo from CCI

# WRAMC PPH Service Dogs



Photo from OT Walter Reed

# Service Dogs

- VETDOGS, NEADS, CCI donating to service members and veterans
  - Close relationship with WRAMC
  - Train dog with service member for one to two weeks
  - Provide ongoing support as needed
  - Anecdotally very positive impact on both physical mobility and psychological symptoms



# Other Programs

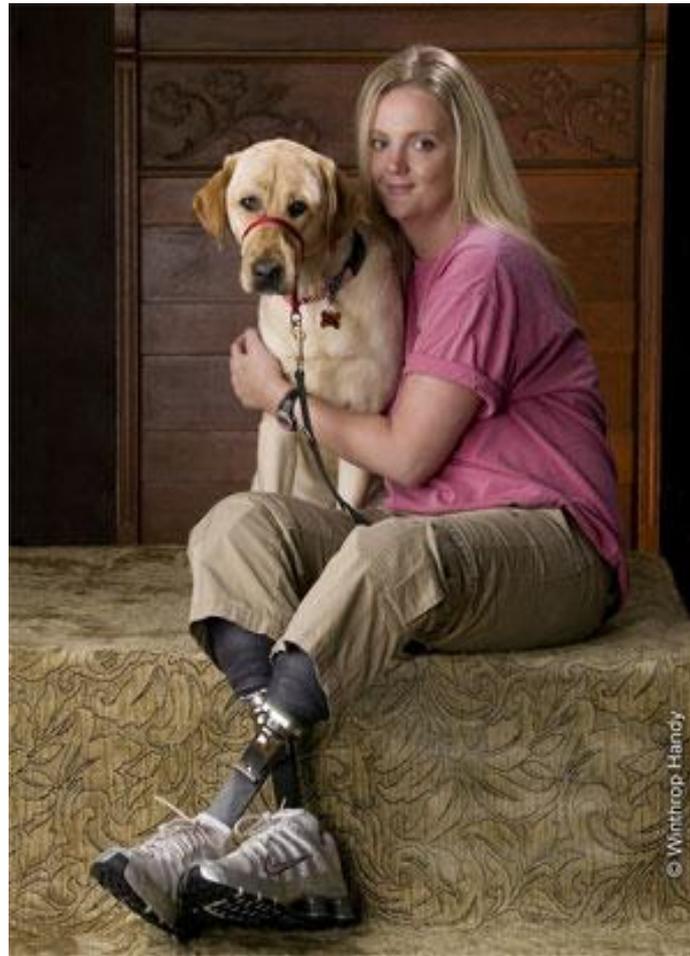


Photo from Pets2Vets

# Pets2Vets



# How training service dogs—or other canine interactions— addresses PTSD symptoms

## PTSD Symptom Clusters

- Re-experiencing (B)
- Avoidance and numbing (C)
- Increased arousal (D)



Photo from Dr. Ritchie

# Re-experiencing symptoms

## \*Grounding in the here and now\*

- Train dog to have positive associations with noises, etc.
- Dogs have the ability to redirect through touch
- Changing the context; “I didn’t have a dog in Iraq”
- Lower anxiety when triggered



Photo from Pets2Vets

# Avoidance and Numbing Symptoms

## Avoidance

- Need to socialize service dogs in the community
- Dogs serve as social lubricants. Isolation is not an option.
- Dogs require a daily schedule, a reason to wake up
- Participate in a meaningful activity, positive sense of purpose

## Numbing

- Need to use positive emotions to reinforce behaviors
- Fake it until you make it
- Mindfulness, living in the moment, affective domain
- Learning effective communication skills, assertiveness



# Symptoms of Increased Arousal

- Concentrate on dog's training, not self survival
- Practice emotional regulation with commands and praise
- Sleep comfort
- Opportunity to practice patience experientially
- Learn to synchronize with low aroused dogs



Photo from CCI

Training also impacts behaviors/symptoms that are common for warriors but may not be part of diagnostic criteria.

- Parenting skills
- Pain management
- Trust issues
- Grief and loss issues



# Clinical Observations

- Reducing social stigma
- Improving emotional regulation and patience
- Improving family dynamics, parenting skills
- Instilling or re-establishing a sense of purpose
- Reintegrating into the community
- Reducing social isolation
- Building relationship skills
- Relaxing the hyper vigilant survival state
- Improving sleep patterns
- Reducing need for pain medications

# Issues

- Policies still not finalized
- Single point of contact requested by service dog organizations
- PTSD data still anecdotal



Photos from CCI

# Growing Interest



Photo from Dr. Ritchie

# Proposed Next Steps

- Continue momentum
- AMEDD Journal supplement
- Continue to work on AFAP issue
- Research on PTSD and service dogs
  - Possible consortium approach
- Other services/VA/DCoE/
- NICOE



# Questions?



Washington Humane Society



CCI