

## Guidance notes for referring practitioner

Research has confirmed that interacting with animals is good for us. For example:

- Positive interaction and bonding between humans and dogs has been found to significantly lower blood pressure in adults and children.
- Animal Assisted Interventions can reduce depressive symptoms in adults; improve mental well-being; reduce physical as well as psychological stress; increase motivation, confidence and self-esteem and encourage groups that would otherwise be more isolated, to socialise.
- A study carried out in a critical care medical setting in 2000 (*Connor & Miller*) suggested that AAT had a calming influence on patients. They went on to advocate the use of AAT to increase patient cognition, range of motion, strength and balance.
- And in 2006 Speech Therapist ***Beth Macauley*** carried out a pilot study with aphasic patients, and concluded that the presence of the dog motivated the people to communicate, suggesting that the dog may have acted as a unique catalyst to motivate the client to talk, and provided an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance for the disordered speech that was produced.

With all this evidence supporting the many benefits that can be achieved by interacting with animals, it makes sense to utilise / harness the natural bond within rehabilitation – and that's exactly what the Stroke and PAT project is all about.

Physical function, cognitive function, emotional / psychosocial health, speech, language and communication skills can all be addressed by utilising AAT as a treatment modality within the rehabilitation programme.

### **Points to consider when making a referral:**

#### Client factors making AAT ***unsuitable / inappropriate:***

- Infectious status; e.g. MRSA positive, Clostridium Difficile positive, ringworm, scabies
- Dislike of animals
- History of violence towards animals
- Aggressive behaviour
- Allergies or phobias
- Possibility of separation anxiety

#### Client factors ***for consideration:***

- Medically at risk / immuno-suppressed - it may be that the perceived benefits outweigh the risks.
- Hemibalismus (uncontrolled movements)
- Fragile bones / osteoporosis
- Recent loss of own pet

All clients should have achievable SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely).

Examples of goals may be:

- Facilitating independence in personal and/or domestic activities of daily living
- Facilitating and promoting functional speech and language skills
- Reducing anxiety and elevating mood, concentration and motivation
- Improving upper and lower limb function, strength and active range of movement.
- Encouraging attention to / awareness of the affected side of the body.
- Promoting functional sitting / standing balance and activity tolerance

Please feel free to contact Sallie Bollans to discuss in more detail should you require assistance.

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