

Animals: good medicine

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state used pets in their therapeutic procedures, with dogs being the preferred animal. And authors of "Pet-Facilitated Psychotherapy in a Hospital Setting" said that such psychotherapy (PFP) fulfills two basic

A study of 92 heart patients found that those who owned pets had a significantly higher chance of surviving one year than those who did not.

needs of patients: the need to love and be loved and the need to feel that they are worthwhile to themselves and others. PFP, it said, also helps develop responsibility and self respect, while teaching patients that love and devotion requires give and take.

It has been suggested that just as there are "seeing eye" dogs and "hearing ear" dogs, PFP could also provide "feeling heart" dogs.

Dr. Leo K. Bustad, dean of the Washington State University

College of Veterinary Medicine, has developed a people-animal partnership program to initiate responsible pet care, formation of a People-Pet Partnership Council, clinical centers devoted to animal-human behavior and the profiling of animals for therapy.

Bill McCulloch and colleague Ned Ellett are working to develop a similar program at Texas A&M, although it is a long-range goal that will require much research and financial support from the school, community and local veterinarians. Bill is teaching a course this semester for third-year veterinary students on the relationships between veterinarians, clients and their animals. The class deals with the psychoactivities in several areas of pet-facilitated therapy, including re-dynamics of the human-animal bond, effective communication skills with pet owners and the improving of human life through therapeutic and educational programs, he said.

Along these lines, psychiatrist McCulloch wrote in "The Veterinarian and Human Health Care Systems" that the ultimate goal of both human and animal medicine is the same — "the promotion and maintenance of human health."

A recent survey indicated that 55 percent of American households have pets, 33 percent with dogs, 12 percent with cats and 10 percent with both. These figures tell us that the total number of

dogs and cats in this country is approximately 64.4 million, with 41.3 million dogs and 23.1 million cats.

Whatever the reason for pet ownership, Michael McCulloch said, there are important psychological benefits involved. And, although veterinarians are not mental health counselors by training, their professional obligations to human clients do require them to respond to the behavior — normal or bizarre — of the approximately 100 million humans who come into their offices each year.

In "Pets and Human Development," psychologist Levinson acknowledges the need every human has for companion animals: "It would undoubtedly be preferable for all children to be brought up in homes by attentive, loving, understanding parents or parent surrogates and for old people to live out their days in their own familiar surroundings, cared for physically and emotionally and given an honored place in society. It would be better if society were not so mechanized, routinized and cut-off from the vital rhythms of the natural world. But this is not the reality of life, at least in the western world, and far-reaching improvements will be a long time in coming. In the meantime, animals can provide some relief, give much pleasure, and remind us of our origins."



Stephanie McKay learns to carefully hold Jelly Bean the rabbit, a pet for the children at French's Care-A-Lot Day Care Center. The rabbit gives youngsters a chance to learn about animals while they show affection, joy and responsibility for him.

Photo by Craig Atchison



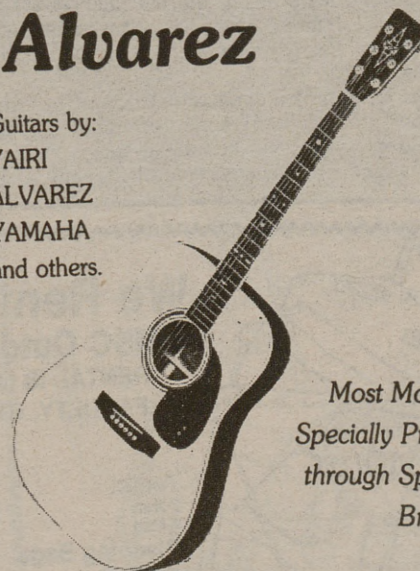
This young colt is one of the new arrivals at the large animal clinic of the Texas A&M University School of Veterinary Medicine. Sired by Sea Phantom and closely guarded by his mother, Caj-pass

in the background, the colt is still unnamed. He is one of many University-owned horses raised for vet students' practice.

Photo by Renee Vermaelen

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