Canines as Co-Therapists

Certified therapists should consider using therapy dogs to enhance their counseling sessions.

Tag words: animal-assisted therapy; canines; counseling; co-therapists; therapists; pet play therapy

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Summary: The use of canines as “co-therapists” may be of a significant assistance to counselors in counseling reserved and non-communicative clients. Several counseling/therapy organizations were contacted to introduce the idea of including canines in therapy sessions.

Video link: http://youtu.be/BGvETLTlf4U

History of Dog Therapy (MW)

The integration of animal-assisted therapy into clinical sessions was first introduced in 1962 to the child psychologist, Boris Levinson, in which Levinson discovered he could make significant progress with a secluded child when Levinson’s dog, Jingles, attended therapy sessions. He went on to find that many children who were withdrawn and uncommunicative would interact positively with the dog, in contrast to how they would behave or interact with an adult. The main purpose of integrating therapy dogs with counseling sessions is to assist people in bettering their lifestyles by lowering stress levels and facilitating an environment of trust, emotional stability, and relationship building.

Dogs must be certified in order to become a therapy dog. These dogs should possess certain traits such as, being friendly to strangers, being able to be handled easily, being calm during loud noises or sudden movements, etc. There are many other traits for a dog to possess in order to become certified. This is to ensure that the dog is not aggressive or hostile to the people that are interacting with it. The people that interact with these therapy dogs may not always be gentle and it is up to the dog to be calm if they are not handled gently.
There is a separation between therapy dogs and service dogs (11). Therapy dogs do need certain training to become certified. At the same time, service dogs also need training to become certified. However, both of their trainings are very different from each other. Service dogs do not provide the type of emotional therapy as therapy dogs do. On the other hand, service dogs assist people who are visually impaired, are deaf, have seizures, etc. They are taught certain commands in order to help keep individuals safe and out of danger. For instance, a dog can be commanded to bark loudly if someone suddenly had a seizure in order to get people to come help the individual out. To contrast, a therapy dog just needs to become certified and the owner may bring that dog to different facilities to be pet and played with by the individual in need. Both of these dogs are important in helping the well-being of an individual, but through very different means.

A big difference of a therapy dog and a service dog is that service dogs are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (11). The therapy dogs do not fall under this distinction. This allows people who have service dogs to enter certain places, such as restaurants, schools, etc when they usually do not allow the entry of animals. Another difference is that the people who train service dogs are certified because these dogs are very useful in helping people and keeping them out of danger.

Today, dog owners can volunteer their time at hospitals and different facilities to help give therapy to those that need it. People rely on therapy dog owners to be available to come visit people in hospitals and other facilities. They do not get paid for their time, which can hinder the amount of therapy dogs in use.

**The Issue of Therapy Dogs (MW)**

Animal-assisted therapy has been exploited for a long period of time; however, it has remained undocumented and only recently has there been research and professional responses administered on the use of animals in therapy. Therapy dogs are brought around to help individuals. However, the individuals must rely on the owners having enough free time to come bring their therapy dogs in. The problem is that these owners do not get paid at all for their time. Problems arise because people may be too busy to help out these individuals in need regularly.

Another issue that arises is that there is no money incentive for a dog owner to get their dogs certified for therapy. The only incentives are to know that they are helping those in need. Although this is a nice notion, it is still difficult to certify more dogs. Although studies have shown that interacting with therapy dogs help reduce stress and release dopamine, there does not seem to be that many of them around.
Therapists are licensed individuals that are able to give certified therapy to an individual whether it be physical or even emotional therapy. They are required to get degrees in their field, so that the therapy they give is effective. The therapy field is vast and diverse with very different forms of treatment. Someone who is doing physical therapy to regain strength in their legs will not undergo the same therapy as someone who may be suffering from depression. Although these types of therapy are different, they can both potentially benefit from interacting with a therapy dog throughout their session.

As previously stated, dog owners who have certified therapy dogs do not get paid for their time. However, a therapist using a therapy dog would be paid for their time. The big difference is a dog owner may have no training at all when dealing with different types of therapy. On the other hand, a therapist knows what the individual needs to benefit from a session and may have the knowledge to incorporate these dogs into a session. An insurance company would potentially pay therapists for these therapy sessions. This would allow for more therapy dogs to be used during sessions. Thus, more therapy dogs would be able to be used and more would need to be certified. This would allow a lot more dogs to help the individuals in therapy.

There have been therapy dogs used in physical therapy sessions. For example, a dog had been used in a physical therapy session to help treat a patient recovering from a stroke (8). The exercises would be integrated with the help of the dog. This would help the patient regain certain motor skills that were lost during the stroke. The patients have stated how working with these dogs have helped them go through these exercises easier. They have stated how these exercises become more fun as they get to interact with the therapy dogs. However, there should be more therapy sessions with these dogs because of all the benefit people get.

**Dogs Being Used in Therapist Sessions (MW)**

Although it is not seen regularly, dogs have been used in therapy sessions. Specifically they have been utilized in physical therapy. They can be seen in hospitals from stroke victims and people in post-surgery (8). The therapists incorporate the dogs in physical therapy focusing in on fine motor skills, regaining lost motility, walking, etc. In a physical therapy session they utilize the dog in helping a stroke patient regain lost motor skills (8). The dog sits still while the stroke patient attempts to take hair clips and clip them to the dogs fur. It causes no discomfort for the dog, while it allows the patient to help regain these essential skills. The therapy would be much more dull for the patient if they were forced to do other types of therapy involving fine motor skills. The patient has even stated how these exercises are fun and allow him to get lost in it, which make
these sessions much more easier for the patient.

The patient who recently had back surgery had limited mobility. The therapy session utilized the dog by allowing the patient to play catch with the dog. They would be directed to throw the ball somewhere and the dog would go retrieve it. This helps refine the mobility that was lost during the surgery. This repetitive motion would help strengthen her muscles while still being able to enjoy the therapy by interacting with the dog. Again, the patient stated how working with the dog has made these therapy sessions easier for her. The therapy dogs can also be used to help patients that need help walking. Again the stroke and post-surgery patient would be able to walk these dogs up and down the halls to help their walking motor skills. These dogs are extremely helpful when it comes to incorporating them into these types of therapy sessions.

Therapy dogs have even been used in speech therapy sessions (10). They have been used for children with mental issues who are not very responsive to people. The dog that was incorporated into the session has allowed these emotionally closed infants to open up and interact with the dog. They have been seen calling out the dogs name and giving it food. They also report that these children are also making eye contact with the dog, which is a big step for children that do not interact with people. They could also potentially have people with speech impediments train with dogs by working with words that the dogs respond to. These therapy dogs may need more training than the average therapy dog though. These dogs have a huge potential to assist many different people suffering from conditions whether it be speech or mobility.

**Different Types of Therapy** (MW)

There are many different fields when it comes to therapy. As previously states, there is physical therapy, speech, play, etc. It is a wide field that attempts to help people that need it. Many of these different types of therapies could potentially benefit from incorporating dogs into their sessions. These different types of therapists may not realize the many types of benefits a patient could have from being able to interact with a dog. Letters explaining the benefits to how these dogs could help their therapy sessions could be sent. These letters to therapists could contain new ideas to incorporate into their therapy sessions.

Play therapy is for children that are around the age of 3 to 11 (12). Allowing the children to play may help reveal more about the children. The way they play may help express their feelings better. It may possibly help these children better if they were able to interact with an animal such as a dog. This type of play may be very different from the play with other children or toys. Play with a dog may uncover a whole new dimension to play therapy. It may reveal invaluable information that may help the children grow and develop better. Play therapy also helps with social integration. A child working with a
dog may be easier for him rather than working with people. It may help by becoming a stepping-stone for the child that has those social anxiety issues. These dogs could prove to be useful in play therapy sessions.

Psychotherapy is a more general term that may target behavior and mental health issues. Allowing a person to work with these types of dogs during therapy may help their progress. Dogs are not judgmental and show unconditional affection to an individual. This may help these people grow and progress further if they are able to work with these animals. Again, these dogs can simply be a stepping stone that someone needs in order to progress further with therapy (13). These dogs may even be helpful in diagnosing people with different types of disorders. Researchers and therapists can study how well people bond with these dogs and how well they treat them. This may offer researchers invaluable information on how people work by seeing the interaction with the dog. There are many benefits that these therapists can gain by allowing the use of these animals.

There is a diverse field when it comes to therapy. New therapies are being used every day. However, many of these therapy sessions have the potential to be greatly improved with the use of these therapy dogs. It is up to the therapists to utilize these animals. Therapists may be convinced with the help of new ideas that utilize these therapy dogs in their sessions. Currently there are dogs being used in therapy sessions and with the help of these therapists voices, they can help spread more awareness for the use of therapy dogs.

**Integrating Therapy with Canines (KH)**

Mental health and educational professionals who engage in animal-assisted therapy demonstrate knowledge and experience in these following areas: 1) social skills and basic obedience training for the pet, 2) therapy interaction for the pet and handler, 3) establishing and maintaining a healthy and friendly relationship with participating staff members, 4) assessing the positive effects of therapy with a therapy dog to clients, 5) the basics of health and risk factors, as well as canine behavioral acuities 6) creating counseling goals and interventions for individual patients, and 7) recording therapeutic progress. For the therapy dog, obedience training in a group format is mandatory, in addition to one-on-one training with the handler. A therapy animal must be well-behaved and respond diligently to its handler’s requests. A fearful, aggressive, or unresponsive animal is not suitable for this profession, for obvious reasons.

The canine plays the role of co-therapist in the session by interacting with the client through therapeutic behaviors. They provide a different type of therapeutic approach for the mental health professional as well as the client. The therapy dog attends every session throughout the day as clients are appropriately screened to see if a therapy dog would be of appropriate in providing additional assistance for the session. A therapy
dog will serve different purposes for different types of therapy needed. Many therapists are incorporating their own therapy dogs into their sessions. However, it is a fairly simple process to obtain a therapy dog certification for one’s own canine. There are several requirements related to the canine in training, such as the canine must be at least one year old with basic obedience training and updated vaccinations, and it must be able to remain calm under distracting circumstances. Once a handler becomes a registered member of a therapy dog organization, such as Therapy Dogs International, the handler will be responsible for reviewing the training manual and a Handler’s DVD. It is mandatory that all new members read this guide thoroughly and watch the DVD before beginning any therapy dog visits. Before they begin any visits, the handler and his or her therapy dog will be evaluated by a certified TDI Evaluator. The TDI Evaluator will have the therapy dog perform several performance tests. Some of the tests required of the dog involve meeting another dog and being able to behave calmly, as well as allowing another person to hold the leash of the dog without showing impeccable manners.

In a psychotherapist’s session, the therapist will introduce the therapy dog to the client and allow the client to interact with the dog however he or she would like. The presence of a canine can facilitate a trustworthy relationship between the therapist and client as well as a comfortable and friendly relationship between the client and the canine. According to an article written by the American Heart Association, the bonds that develop between human and animals have proven to relieve the anxiousness and unfamiliarity of therapy (1). Animals can connect with the clients in a way that does not require the clients to verbally respond to them. With people, in order for our feelings to be expressed, we are highly verbal. Sometimes, this may not be the case, and instead, we emotionally abandon the help that would be given to us.

Canines have a keen sense of detecting and translating body language far better than a human; however, humans are slowly beginning to understand the behavior and expressions of canines. A dog’s playful tail wagging when it is first introduced to people can be characterized as a sign of friendliness and happiness. This can help the client feel more comfortable in their environment as well as during therapy. Similar to humans, canines can also be placed under stress; therefore, it is important to monitor both the client’s stress level as well as the therapy dog after it has participated in several sessions.

The use of therapy dogs is also highly conventional for play therapy where children are in a more comfortable and safe environment, can better express themselves, and experience new things with the assistance of a therapy dog. A therapy dog used in play therapy can help the child feel less vulnerable to therapy because they are interacting with animals instead of adults who can, at times, appear as a threat towards a child. After being brought to a separate playroom with toys for the children as well as dog toys, the mental health professional can observe the interaction and the bond between the animal and the child in a separate room. While the therapy dog is in the playroom with the child, it becomes the co-therapist of the session. The therapist will makes statements about the
child’s behavioral progress to the therapy dog instead of directly to the child. For example, the therapist would say “Joey doesn’t seem like he wants to play with that toy today,” and this allows the child to express their feelings in the presence of another living being, the therapy dog (2). According to Thompson, “current research suggests that [pet play therapy] offers numerous benefits beyond those available through traditional therapies” (2).

There has been research that has shown the increasing acceptability of animal-human interactions to better improve socialization skills, confidence levels, and behavioral skills (3). Therapy dogs that participate in therapy provide an effective way for the client to communicate and express their feelings in a less threatening environment. They also allow the client to break down emotional barriers that would otherwise be a more hesitant move if he or she were only with the mental health therapist.

A Comparison to Hippotherapy (KH)

There are many animals that are used in animal-assisted therapy; however, handlers of therapy dogs are not protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. This means that unless a therapist is utilizing a therapy dog in their therapy, institutions and many other people depend on local volunteers who handle therapy dogs to visit on their own time. If the use of therapy dogs in therapy increased, there would be greater opportunities for patients to interact with the canines.

Although horses can be used in animal-assisted therapy, there is a specific type of therapy that applies a horse’s rhythmic movement to help control and increase skills related to lower motor ability, such as sitting, standing, and walking (4). According to the American Hippotherapy Association, hippotherapy can be defined as “a physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy treatment strategy that utilizes equine movement as part of an integrated intervention program to achieve functional outcomes” (4). How does this compare with canines as co-therapists? As stated before, handlers of therapy dogs are not protected under the ADA. According to the ADA, a therapy dog is one that is “trained to provide comfort and affection to people in long-term care, hospitals, retirement homes, schools, mental health institutions, and other stressful situations to include disaster areas… [and] provide people with animal contact, people who may or may not have a form of disability” (5). Because the horses that are used in hippotherapy are trained by physical and occupational therapists that have also received extra training in handling horses specifically for hippotherapy, these therapists are protected under the ADA. The horse’s gait provides a model of movement for the special needs individual who would position himself or herself to better fit the rhythmic movement of the horse.
Hippotherapy was first introduced in the 1960s when the movement of horses was incorporated into physical therapy in Europe (4). Service dogs have been introduced into society during World War II as they assisted wounded soldiers depending on their needs. As of today, there is not a specific therapy that utilizes the beneficial effects of a therapy dog. The interaction between a person and a canine is just as constructive and useful in therapy as horses are in therapy. For example, a therapy dog placed in physical therapy can participate in therapeutic activities, which can include the patient tugging on a rope with the canine, also known as “tug-of-war”. This type of physical activity is demanding of patients, and with the presence of an animal, it makes the therapy sessions less stressful and exhausting and more entertaining.

There is no therapy that specializes in utilizing the interactive behavior that canines have with humans and incorporating them into their therapy session; however, there are more professionally trained therapists who are, at their own will, integrating therapy dogs into their own offices and therapy sessions. Unless a client is fortunate enough to see a therapist who happens to have a therapy dog, most people who visit therapists will not have access to therapy dogs.

**The Prevalence of Canines as Co-Therapists (KH)**

The appearance of therapy dogs at local institutions is not a common sight because it requires locals to volunteer their own time to schedule visits. If a client believes he or she would feel more comfortable seeing a therapist who has a therapy dog, this is also an uncommon event. Although there are some trained mental health therapists in the country who currently have therapy dogs present during sessions, there are not enough therapists getting involved with animal-assisted therapy. Their involvement and cooperation plays a major role in being able to introduce a new approach to therapy nowadays.

Dr. Lois Abrams, a licensed marriage and family therapist in California, wrote a descriptive tale about her experience with her two therapy dogs who were her co-therapists, Duke and Romeo. She shared her experience about how Duke and Romeo were able to “[detect] an individual’s emotional state long before [she] could” based on their ability to smell and perceive certain body languages very well (6). Given the right amount of training, her two dogs were both very welcoming and provided comfort for her clients by nestling next to a client’s leg during the first sessions. Eventually, one of the dogs would rest on his or her lap when the client seemed more comfortable being in therapy.
According to Dr. Lois Abrams:

*The therapeutic benefits, psychological, physical and spiritual of petting a dog have been scientifically documented as noted; however the advantage and practice of using animals as co-therapists in clinical psychotherapy practice has yet to be adequately, scientifically documented. Terminologies regarding Animal Assisted Therapy delineated by Delta Society, 2004, Pet Therapy term used by Therapy Dogs International, 2007; or Animal Enhanced Program have a similar basis of interpretation and acceptance in the general volunteer world of animal and handler (6).*

There are many non-profit and profit organizations that are dedicated to helping professionals in the mental health field who want to work with their canine companions in animal-assisted therapy. Having a canine as a co-therapist allows enhancement and expansion of the knowledge of working with therapy dogs in counseling sessions. However, if one were to research any statistical information that would give the amount of therapists around the country who have canine co-therapists, he or she would not be able to find that data because, unfortunately, it is not a prevalent occurrence.

The American Heart Association carried out an experiment that tested whether or not a 12-minute visit with an animal, in this case, a friendly canine, can improve heart and lung capabilities by lowering blood pressure, decreasing stressful hormones and anxiety among hospitalized heart failure patients (1).

Researchers found that patients’ anxiety levels dropped 24% when they were visited by therapy dogs (1). Their data even proved that the benefits of therapy dogs visiting patients exceeded those that resulted from a visit with a human volunteer or from being left alone. If a greater amount of research and data were collected to demonstrate that canines have the capability of offering a substantial amount of guidance and improvement, both physical and mental, then, there would be an increase in the amount of specially trained therapy dogs that can participate in therapy.

**Ethics behind Therapy Dogs (KH)**
Because there has not been an abundance of data collected on how many professionally trained counselors have therapy dogs, it is difficult to answer certain questions regarding their experiences with therapy dogs. Certain questions that could be asked may allow us to come to a conclusion as to why there are not more therapists who have canines as co-therapists in their one-on-one sessions with their clients.

Many people have a great fear for animals, especially canines. Many times, it is due to a terrible, traumatic encounter with a dog during their childhood that caused them to have such great fears, and just like any difficult task, it is not easy to overcome one’s fears. Based on experience and knowledge, a possible assumption as to why mental health professionals would not be willing to incorporate a therapy dog into their therapy is because they could possibly be fearful of canines themselves. It takes a lot of courage and time to ask a person to face their fears, and sometimes, it is just not the appropriate time for them to do such a thing. However, it could be a little less threatening if the therapist were introduced to a smaller dog, perhaps a puppy that has gone through basic obedience training. This way it will create a less intimidating environment and interaction between the handler and the dog. The same approach can be given to a client that is fearful of animals, and by breaking this fear and slowly creating a bond between human and animal, humans can increase their confidence levels and improve their behavioral skills.

Most organizations that support and promote animal-assisted therapy have a Code of Ethics that expects its volunteers to display proper conduct when representing their organization. Some of their expectations include (1) mutual respect and professional cooperation towards staff, towards other volunteers, as well as their animals; (2) members are expected to behave in a professional manner towards all other registered therapy dog teams regardless of registry; (3) discriminating anyone for their services, either directly or indirectly, anything of economic value, such as a gift, gratuity or favor (7).

Some standards may seem like common sense to people, however, when it comes to helping the needs of others, it is important to know how to assist the person’s needs with proper behavior and conduct. It is the handler/owner’s responsibility to recognize and understand that every person’s situation is different and may require different ways to assist him or her. In the case of a mental health professional, screening each patient is a valuable step before introducing a therapy dog into session. This allows the therapist to analyze and establish a goal for the therapy dog in order to best assist the patient.

Supporting Therapy Dogs in Therapy
Through increasing awareness and by word-of-mouth, mental health professionals may or may not consider having canine co-therapists in therapy alongside them. Individuals with disabilities or special needs are often advised to seek a service dog or to participate in hippotherapy; however, animals, especially canines, can offer as much assistance as a service dog or a horse. Some canines may not be able to provide physical movement, such as lift an individual on to its back, but they present different functions that meet the needs of the individual. Canines present themselves as friendly, innocent living beings, and they reinforce emotional stability by dramatically decreasing stress levels, blood pressure, and anxiety in humans. Service dogs and horses utilized in hippotherapy provide physical assistance, whereas therapy dogs contribute wholeheartedly to helping people develop control over their emotions and state of mind.

Mental health professionals who currently have therapy dogs within their facilities and in their therapy sessions will be presented with a series of questions relating to the experience, process, and outcome of having a therapy dog participating in such a pronounced health-related field. Therapists who have not handled an animal before or even considered allowing animals in their workplace will be presented with the idea of integrating volunteer dogs as an assistant. It will be important to discover some of the reasons why professionals would accept a therapy dog or deny one. There are many factors that could possibly play a role in their decisions, and if we could figure out and create solutions to these issues, we may change their perspective on therapy dogs at the office. By concentrating on specific questions that may be asked by the counselors we direct our research towards, we can establish a letter answering these questions, such as *Do I need to use a certified therapy dog that is owned by another handler?* *Can I certify my own dog?* *Can I train a shelter dog to become a therapy dog?* *What is the training and certification process?* We would be able to obtain the answers to these questions by contacting therapy dog organizations, in addition to counselors who have experience with engaging their own therapy dogs into therapy sessions.

Canines, as well as humans, have different personalities, and it would be an interesting idea if therapists were able to match up certain personalities of their therapy dogs with those of their patients. There could be a variety of activities, especially utilized in play therapy, that would help match up certain dogs with their patients. Another possible consideration is that individual patients may want to interact with a specific dog that could make their therapy session more comfortable. It is in our best interest to be able to make patients as comfortable as possible during strenuous or mentally exhausting situations. Therapists, in general, commit themselves to their work in efforts to improve their clients’ lifestyles or well-being. If a canine could physically or mentally assist the therapists, this three-way interaction among the therapist, client, and canine, can offer the utmost support for one another. People would not have to be as dependent on volunteer dogs visiting them from non-certified handlers who may not know the proper way to approach a mentally unstable person.
There are many steps that need to be done before completely integrating therapy dogs in therapist sessions. Initially, contacting organizations that help support therapy dogs in physical therapy sessions will help form support in getting these dogs to be more active in patients’ lives. Finding organizations online that support this cause will help in convincing therapists to use therapy dogs. This could be helpful by starting a petition online to show how much support there is for these dogs. These organizations may even know patients that have first-hand experience with working with these dogs. This will further display the benefits from therapy dogs.

Contacting hippotherapists will also help this cause. They have effectively brought physical therapy and horses together in this type of therapy. There are parallels with physical therapy and dogs, which can be just as effective. As previously stated, physical therapists have integrated physical therapy exercises into interacting with a dog. Although it may not be as interactive as working directly with a horse, it can still be just as effective. Again, stress levels are reduced and more dopamine is produced while working with dogs. This along with physical therapy may help the individual progress better.

Integrating therapy dogs into therapist sessions may be difficult because they may not necessarily need them. However, with all the evidence on all the benefits from utilizing dogs it may prove to be easier than thought. These different kinds of therapists may see all the positives as it is reflected in hippotherapy. In the future, dogs may be as essential to therapy as the therapist himself.

Community Action: Using Canines to Assist Therapists

Not many mental health professions are aware of the potential benefits of canine-assisted therapy in their counseling sessions. It was best to address this problem by contacting licensed therapists and organizations to help shed light on the benefits of including canines or animals, in general, in their professions. We focused on major organizations of mental health professionals and stated our research and service project via e-mail.

The five organizations below are currently participating in animal-assisted therapy in professional counseling environments:

1. Canine Partners of the Rockies
2. Betty Ford Center
3. Guidance Facilitators
4. Family Dog Training and Behavioral Center (in North Valley Center, Kansas)
5. Health Heelers, Inc.

Our main focus for them was to determine, based on their experience, what specifics were needed in order to incorporate therapy dogs into a professional environment. Several questions that we asked them are in bold below:

1. **How long did the process take to certify your canine as a therapy dog? And what did the process consist of? (i.e. training days, in and out of the office?)**
2. **Are there any federal rules and regulations that must be followed if a certified therapist would like to incorporate therapy dogs into their sessions?**
3. **Are there any liability forms that must be filled out by the clients before introducing a therapy dog to your clients?**
4. **Do therapy dogs get covered by insurance companies if a therapist integrates them into their sessions?**
5. **Would you consider having a therapy dog participate in counseling sessions a fairly simple process for counselors who would consider it?**

Dr. Lois M. Abrams from Guidance Facilitators, a clinical psychotherapist who currently uses her Cavalier King Charles Spaniels in her counseling sessions, responded immediately to our e-mail with these responses to the questions asked, respectively.

**Question 1:** I began taking Duke to my office as a puppy. I also took Romeo as a puppy. I must say that I learned from my work with Duke so Romeo benefited from my experience. We also attended basic puppy kindergarten classes taught by an outstanding trainer Sue Myles who used positive reinforcement. And advance obedience classes. I believe it is essential to use this type of training for a psychotherapy practice. Karen Pryor is the renown "clicker trainer." I have been to her workshops and seminars. I select the CKCS breed for its reputation as "comfort dogs." I tell everyone that my dogs are still in training and Duke will be 14 next month. I think the most important element was my learning my dog's language. I read (see below) and took classes in animal behavior. As a team the dogs and I were certified/registered as Pet Partners. The training and process I believe is essential precursor for in office therapy work. To learn more I became an evaluator and instructor for Delta Society now known as Pet Partners. I also was certified with Duke with TDI. Unfortunately TDI would not permit belonging to two organizations. I stayed with PP because they re-certify every two years. TDI you just send in money. Since I believe that training in a continual process for both K9 and handler I value PP program. Both dogs were present every hour I worked unless my client was allergic. Then the dogs were put into a neutral room. I always kept seating that the dogs were not permitted to be in or near. I never had an issue with the allergy. My voice mail states clearly that I work with the dogs. So before an appointment is made my potential client is aware. We train
every day and I am still learning about what the dogs are communicating to me and what I am signaling to them.

**Question 2:** To my knowledge there are not any federal or state laws. I do have liability insurance at my office and home. The dogs are specified. There has not been any extra charge for them. It might be breed related.

**Question 3:** I have all my clients sign an informed consent for the dogs to be present in the sessions.

**Question 4:** My malpractice insurance considers them like a game or sand tray as an adjunctive therapy treatment modality. I do have personal liability. Being trained and certified/registered as a Pet Partner we are insured but only doing volunteer work. I volunteer at youth shelters, hospitals, and assisted living. We were also in HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response. I served on the founding board and retired the end of 2012.

**Question 5:** No I do not consider it "simple." I have mentored and trained several therapist who use their dog in the practice. If the therapist considers it "simple" then they have not taken the proper steps for training and understanding the process of communicating with a dog.


When we contacted the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association, an organization focused on speech therapy, explaining the benefits of involving a therapy dog during their counseling sessions. They were highly impressed with our project and were interested to learn more about how therapy dogs can be associated with therapy. I had stated specifically how dogs could potentially be used to help patients engaging in speech therapy by speaking commands to a dog in therapy. The patient would gain practice from interacting with the therapy dog. An advocate from NSSLHA had asked if I wanted to publish an article, which I had responded with a yes. This is a stepping stone that will help further the cause of getting dogs into therapy sessions.

Family Dog Training and Behavioral Center was the next organization that responded to our e-mail. This organization, located in Valley Center, Kansas, provided us with a lot of information about professional therapy dogs and clarified a lot of misguided assumptions counselors may have about therapy dogs. Here’s how they responded:
Hello, thank you for your interest in the area of Professional Therapy Dogs. First let me explain the difference in classification between Therapy Dogs and Professional Therapy Dogs. Therapy Dogs are certified under parent organizations such as DELTA, Therapy Dogs International, or Therapy Dogs Inc. They pass a fairly simple test showing they have good basic obedience skills and the temperament to go as VOLUNTEERS to facilities where they are invited. The parent organization carries their liability insurance. Professional Therapy Dogs have no umbrella organization and thankfully no interference from the federal government. A few states, such as Kansas have given recognition to PTD's awarding the same public access rights as service dogs. Each professional, or group of professionals, such as various Dr's, therapists, counselors, etc must provide their own insurance. They would develop whatever liability waivers they deem necessary for their situation. Since there is no specific governing body, and each entity is responsible for their own liability, the training level of the dogs can vary. Some school districts have written specific testing qualifications for the dogs and a limited number of qualified evaluators. I am one of the 4 evaluators for the Wichita school district.

In addition to that Family Dog Training & Behavioral Center, is the only business in the area that has developed a comprehensive program for certifying PTD teams. The process can vary in time and expense depending on the prior training of the dog. Typically the professional wishing to certify a dog to assist in their work, already has a dog. At times the dog is not suitable or the person wants to start with a new dog. We can assist in the search for a dog with suitable temperament if they wish. If starting with a puppy, training starts with puppy socialization classes and continues through advanced obedience. We also work in public settings, restaurants, malls etc. since the dogs must pass an extensive public access test as well as observing the dog in it's work situation. Once I am satisfied the dog and the owner meet my criteria, I will administer the final test and give them a certification and ID card identifying the dog as a Professional Therapy Dog. I hope this answers your questions. If you need more information please let me know. A great book on Animal Assisted Therapy is: Animal Assisted Therapy; Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice Edited Aubrey H. Fine.

Other organizations that specialized in different types of therapy were contacted, and they had not associated their counseling sessions with animals when we contacted them. These included the organizations listed below:

1. The Play Therapy Training Institute:
2. American Physical Therapy Association of NJ:
3. National Student Speech Language Hearing Association
4. New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association
5. Association for Play Therapy USA
6. Play Therapy International

We formatted our e-mail by stating:

Have you heard of the benefits people receive when interacting with therapy dogs? Mental health and educational professionals who engage in animal-assisted therapy demonstrate knowledge and experience in these following areas: 1) social skills and basic obedience training for the pet, 2) therapy interaction for the pet and handler, 3) establishing and maintaining a healthy and friendly relationship with participating staff members, 4) assessing the positive effects of therapy with a therapy dog to clients, 5) the basics of health and risk factors, as well as canine behavioral acuities 6) creating counseling goals and interventions for individual patients, and 7) recording therapeutic progress. If you were able to agree with those unique characteristics, then you would make the perfect candidate in participating in animal-assisted therapy. Dogs have the ability to help a person with non-communicative behavior, personal struggles, or stressful situations. There are many advantages that come with integrating a therapy dog in your sessions with clients.

The therapy dog certification process is fairly simple. Certain canine breeds can be easily trained and incorporated into regular therapy sessions. For example, in physical therapy, the dog can be trained and incorporated in helping a patient regain certain motor skills. The dog could be trained to perform certain motor tasks at the sight of a hand motion, which could help possible mentally-handicapped patients regain their fine motor skills under the assurance of a canine. Dogs are highly versatile, and we strongly believe that the utilization of therapy dogs to assist clients, as well as mental health professionals, during counseling sessions will prove to be highly beneficial, and the progress of the sessions will be more efficient and positive.

Hippotherapy has shown the utilization of horses in physical therapy. This type of therapy helps those in need of physical therapy by utilizing the movement of the horse as the foundation of the treatment. Some insurance companies recognize the benefits of this treatment and may cover its costs. Unlike hippotherapy, there is not yet a recognized dog therapy counterpart. At this point in time, it would be highly unlikely that health insurance companies would consider “dog therapy” as a treatment modality. This is not to say, however, that therapy dogs cannot be utilized in counseling/therapy sessions. Incorporating canine-assisted therapy or even having a dog present may help relax the patient and make the counseling session more effective.
References:


