

Animal-assisted therapy decreases patient anxiety in pre-MRI setting, study suggests

April 30 2011

Patients who undergo MRI often suffer from elevated anxiety. Patient discomfort may cause poor image quality due to motion artifacts or early termination. Anxiolytic medications are currently used to reduce this anticipated anxiety , but animal-assisted therapy may be a non-invasive alternative treatment with fewer adverse effects, according to an exhibit being presented at the 2011 American Roentgen Ray Society's annual meeting.

The project was conceived by a fifteen-year-old high student Allison Ruchman. During the course of her MRI, she experienced anxiety and claustrophobia. She relieved her tension by creating a mental picture of her dog, Wally, and believed that her experience could be applicable to other patients who often need anti-anxiety drugs in order to complete the examination. Allison soon became a certified dog therapist, and conducted the research on this project, assisting physicians who compiled and analyzed data and prepared an abstract of the study.

The study was conducted at Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, NJ. Twenty-eight patients who were scheduled to undergo outpatient MRI were selected for an intervention with a certified therapy dog. Patients interacted with the therapy dog at various levels of intensity for periods of fifteen minutes, approximately thirty minutes prior to their scheduled MRI. Six patients underwent no intervention for the same period of time without a therapy dog.

"The most significant aspect of our findings was the fact that time spent

with a dog (animal-assisted therapy) could substitute for pharmacologic anxiolysis (anti-anxiety medication) often needed to assist patients having an MRI," said Richard Ruchman, MD, one of the authors of the study.

"A great deal of research is currently being conducted on animal assisted therapy in the medical environment. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has particularly addressed animal-assisted therapy in the radiology department, and I believe that many applications of could flow from our findings. Current estimates are that 15% or more of patients cannot proceed with an MRI due to [anxiety](#) and a non-pharmacologic solution is noteworthy," said Dr. Ruchman.

This exhibit is being presented in conjunction with the 2011 American Roentgen Ray Society's annual meeting.

Provided by American Roentgen Ray Society

Citation: Animal-assisted therapy decreases patient anxiety in pre-MRI setting, study suggests (2011, April 30) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-04-animal-assisted-therapy-decreases-patient-anxiety.html>

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