

Therapy dogs may help lower emergency clinicians' stress

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Credit: Dr. Kline

New research published in *Academic Emergency Medicine* indicates that for physicians and nurses working evening shifts in the emergency department, interacting with a therapy dog for several minutes may help lower stress.

In the 122-participant study, emergency providers randomized to a five-minute interaction with a [therapy dog](#) and handler had a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety using a visual analogue scale compared with patients randomized to coloring mandalas for five minutes with colored pencils. Also, at the end of the shift, emergency providers had lower salivary cortisol (a stress hormone) with either coloring or therapy dog interactions compared with controls.

"Many [healthcare workers](#) and laypersons believe that dog-assisted support can improve emotional well-being in the healthcare setting, but little hard data exist to scientifically evaluate this belief, especially in emergency care," said lead author Jeffrey A. Kline, MD, of the Indiana University School of Medicine. "We provide novel data to suggest that emergency care providers enjoyed seeing a dog on shift, and received a small benefit in stress reduction after the interaction. We still do not know the extent to which the benefit was from the dog, the handler, or the combination of the two."

More information: Jeffrey A. Kline et al, Randomized Trial of Therapy Dogs Versus Deliberative Coloring (Art Therapy) to Reduce Stress in Emergency Medicine Providers, *Academic Emergency Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/acem.13939](https://doi.org/10.1111/acem.13939)

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