Animal therapy reduces need for pain medication after joint-replacement surgery

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Patients recovering from total joint replacement surgery who receive animal-assisted therapy (AAT) require less pain medication than those who do not experience this type of therapy.

These data were published in the August/September issue of Anthrozoos by researchers from Loyola University Chicago Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing and Loyola University Health System. Anthrozoos is the official journal of the International Society for Anthrozoology.

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) has been used in a variety of health-care settings to improve quality of life and physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive health for patients.

"The animal-human connection is powerful in reducing stress and in generating a sense of well-being," said Julia Havey, MSN, RN, CCM, lead author, Loyola University Health System. "This study further demonstrates the positive influence animals can have on human recovery."

This retrospective study measured the need for oral pain medication in patients who were exposed to animal-assisted therapy and those who were not. The groups were similar in age, gender, ethnicity, length of stay and type of total joint replacement. The animal-assisted therapy consisted of daily visits from specially trained dogs for an average of five to 15 minutes. The need for oral pain medication was significantly less (28 percent less) in the animal-assisted therapy group (15.32 mg

versus 21.16 mg).

"This study offers interesting observations about the healing potential of animals," said Fran Vlasses, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN, co-author and associate professor and chair, Health Systems, Leadership and Policy Department, Loyola University Chicago Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing. "The efficacy of animal-assisted therapy in decreasing the need for pain medication and its effect on patient well-being after surgery deserves further study."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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