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."
