

Study finds dog therapy can reduce ER patients' pain and anxiety

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University of Saskatchewan (USask) research shows therapy dogs can help reduce pain and improve well-being for people treated in emergency rooms.

St. John Ambulance therapy dog teams were introduced for 10-minute visits at the Royal University Hospital (RUH) [emergency department](#) in Saskatoon. Patients reported clinically significant changes in pain, anxiety, depression and well-being after the canine intervention compared to treatment without.

The results of a controlled clinical trial by USask teams were published in the peer-reviewed journal *PLOS ONE* on March 9, 2022.

Research took place under the leadership of Dr. Colleen Dell (Ph.D.), USask Research Chair in One Health and Wellness and co-founder of the PAWS Your Stress program, and Dr. James Stempien (MD), provincial head, Emergency Medicine. The team included other USask researchers and students from several colleges, as well as patient advisors.

A total of 48% of patients who received the intervention experienced a reduction in anxiety, while changes were also noted by participants for pain (43%), depression (46%) and improved well-being (41%).

"The findings of this study contribute important knowledge towards the potential value of emergency department [therapy dogs](#) to affect patients' experience of [pain](#), and related measures of anxiety, depression and well-being," said Dell. "This is the first controlled trial of its kind in Canada—and elsewhere as far as we know."

"The Emergency Room is a hectic place, and as an ER doctor myself, I know that anything we can do to improve the patient experience is welcomed," Stempien added.

More information: Ben Carey et al, Outcomes of a controlled trial with visiting therapy dog teams on pain in adults in an emergency department, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0262599](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262599)

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