

## EQUINE-FACILITATED GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH CHRONIC PSYCHIATRIC INPATIENTS: TWO CONTROLLED STUDIES

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**Introduction:** Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is becoming increasingly utilized for psychiatric patients with suboptimal response to traditional therapies. Larger animals, such as horses, may be especially effective therapy enhancers for some patients.

**Objectives:** We have introduced AAT at a 500 bed psychiatric hospital in New Jersey. We previously conducted a randomized control trial (n=103) of ten weekly AAT group therapy sessions, comparing canine assisted therapy, equine facilitated therapy (EFT), enhanced psychosocial therapy, and standard treatment in highly regressed and/or violent patients. Initial analyses indicated that the EFT group had fewer violence-related incidents during the 3 months following the intervention compared with the other groups ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Methods:** We have initiated a second randomized controlled study comparing EFT with standard hospital treatment in a similar sample.

**Aims:** Based on observations that patients with trauma/abuse histories may find AAT beneficial, this partial replication study is assessing whether trauma history and perceptions relate to symptomatic and functional outcome with EFT.

**Results:** Preliminary post-session interviews over several weeks for a subgroup of four patients with reported trauma histories (rates comparable to persons with PTSD on the Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire) elicited explicit trauma-related themes (e.g., recollection of past abuse) as well as putative indirect references such as identifying with the horses as understanding their pain and representing "hope."

**Conclusions:** The presentation reviews the evolution and refinement of the intervention at our hospital, challenges to implementation, therapeutic course, preliminary outcome assessments, quantitative and qualitative, comparing EFT with standard treatment in the studies.