



# Health Mentors Program Newsletter

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## HMP Newsletter Editors:

Medical Student:

Tara "TJ" Cahanap

Nursing Student:

Stephanie Chin

Occupational Therapy  
Student:

Samantha Burke

Pharmacy Student:

Arden Gewirtz

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Paging Dr. Four Paws - P2-P3

Student Reflections - P4

Recruitment for new volunteer  
Health Mentors - P4

## A Warm Thank You!

by Stephanie Chin

As the spring semester draws to an end, we would like to thank all of our remarkable mentors for another memorable year! Health Mentors is such a valuable program because it allows students from a variety of health backgrounds to engage in interprofessional collaboration and address mentors' needs in the community. Such needs include accessibility, adequate resources, convenience, and safety both at home and in the neighborhood. Thus, mentors not only get the chance to speak up about a particular matter of concern, but they also inspire effective interprofessional teamwork at Jefferson.

During these past few months, students were invited to mentors' homes and had the opportunity to discover how their living environment impacted their health conditions. After the home visits, student teams presented to their peers their experiences in the different communities and homes they visited. Important matters were discussed regarding the mentor's autonomy, social support and maintenance of daily living. In order to address some of these issues, students worked on an attainable SMART goal with their mentors.

During these home visits, student teams were able to delve deeper into their mentor's lifestyle and gain insight into their day-to-day lives. They were able to learn about environmental factors when approaching and caring for a health condition.

Next year, students will work on developing an advocacy project with their mentors. Until then, on behalf of the Health Mentors Program, we hope everyone has a wonderful summer!

# Paging Dr. Four Paws

By Arden Gewirtz

There is something profoundly deep about the connection between humans and animals, that anyone who has ever loved a pet can readily attest to. In fact, with 68% of American households owning a pet, it comes as no surprise that many openly proclaim the delight they bring. We feel joy when they come bounding into the room just because we have opened the door; we hurt when the day comes that their sweet face is no longer there. Whether or not that relationship is verging on profound or commonplace, researchers agree that it is verifiably impactful in nature, possibly medicinal.



Pet therapy is on the rise for use in physical health, mental health and physical therapy. Most animal-assisted therapy currently centers around dogs, but cats, goats, horses, pigs, and birds have all been used. Firstly, animals reduce the stress associated with healthcare visits or hospital stays, and provide a welcome reprieve from what can be an anxiety-filled time period in someone's life. Studies found that petting a dog decreases the autonomic nervous system's stress response and instead increases levels of serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin. In addition to improving mood, these neurotransmitters are shown to decrease overall physical pain ("Animal-Assisted", 2019).



Understanding the benefits of animal-assisted therapy when it comes to physical improvement related to health conditions is somewhat of a new frontier. In 2015, a groundbreaking study saw blood pressure lowered and cardiovascular health improved when a group of hospitalized heart failure patients began meeting with dogs for 12 minutes daily. Patients were stratified into three groups - those receiving pet therapy, those receiving a volunteer, and those receiving nothing.

Those heart failure patients who had a visit with dogs saw lowered arterial pressures, diminished release of stress hormones, improved Vmax and O2 capacity, and decreased anxiety.

Among the statistics obtained:

“Levels of the stress hormone epinephrine dropped an average 14.1 pcg/mL or 17 percent in the volunteer-dog team group; 2 percent in the volunteer-only group; and rose an average of 7 percent in the at-rest group. Systolic pulmonary artery pressure, a measure of pressure in the lungs, dropped in the volunteer-dog team group 5 percent during and 5 percent after therapy. It rose during and after therapy in the other two groups. The volunteer-dog team group showed more improvement than the volunteer-only group in right atrial pressure, norepinephrine level and heart rate. This therapy warrants serious consideration as an adjunct to medical therapy in hospitalized heart failure patients” (Gawlinski, 2012).

In fact, studies show that up to 80% of patients hospitalized for serious medical conditions requiring stays in the ICU suffer from delirium, loneliness, agitation, and depression. These conditions are less common in patients who are more mentally active during their stays; however, certain conditions such as head trauma or Alzheimer’s disease do not afford the opportunity to negate this variable. Animals have been shown to increase mental stimulation, even in non-communicative patients. Patients who participated in animal therapy were able to meet goals faster by involving the animals – standing for longer periods of time, walking greater distances, facilitating mental recall and increasing motor skills (Hedin, 2018).



It appears nowadays, the comfort of man’s best friend may be just what the doctor orders. At Jefferson, pet therapy visits are held three to four times per month on each inpatient unit. Outpatient opportunities include a monthly “Pet Therapy Yappy-Happy Hour” at Jefferson’s main center city hospital (“Pet Therapy”, 2019). More information can be found on Jefferson’s Community Calendar of Events.

Animal-Assisted Therapy Research Findings. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.uclahealth.org/pac/animal-assisted-therapy>

Gawlinski, A. (2012). Use of Animal-Assisted Therapy to decrease cardiopulmonary pressures, neurohormone levels, and state anxiety in patients hospitalized with heart failure. *American Journal of Critical Care*, 16(6). doi:10.1186/isrctn26749623

Hedin, M. (2018, February 13). Therapy dogs may unlock health benefits for patients in hospital ICUs. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/02/12/therapy-dogs-could-help-icu-patients>

Pet Therapy Yappy-Happy Hour. Retrieved April 22, 2019, from <https://hospitals.jefferson.edu/content/health/calendar-of-events/community/pet-therapy-yappy-happy-hour.html>

# Student Reflections



Cohort 11 Team 93 engages with their Health Mentor during their third visit.

Students from Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) joined HMP in 2016. Here are two reflections from MLS students:

*“Overall, the experience in this program gave me an even greater understanding at what being a health professional is and the lives we impact with our specialized care, whether it is in the laboratory or at the bedside. The emotions triggered from this experience were strengthened after attending the Year One Learning Activity and witnessing first-hand the interactions between different health professionals. It was a life changing experience, which gave an even greater meaning to the work we all give as future health professionals.”*

*“Through talking with my teammates, I learned new aspects about their respective disciplines and discovered different viewpoints on ways to help our mentor. I was also able to explain medical laboratory science to my group members because they were unaware of our role in healthcare. Personally, I appreciated the knowledge and experience I gained through the program and look forward to meeting next semester.”*

## Spread the Word, Volunteers Needed!

We are looking for Health Mentors from all different backgrounds who are at least 18 years of age and are living with a chronic condition or impairment (high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, blindness, etc.) or are a caretaker to someone who is living with a chronic condition or impairment and who enjoys sharing their personal health experiences.

If you know someone who is interested in learning more about the Health Mentors Program, please have them contact Ekan Ukanna:

Phone: 215-955-4385 Email: [HMP@jefferson.edu](mailto:HMP@jefferson.edu)