

# on the First Use of Animal-Assisted Therapy for Residents in Taiwanese Residential Facilities

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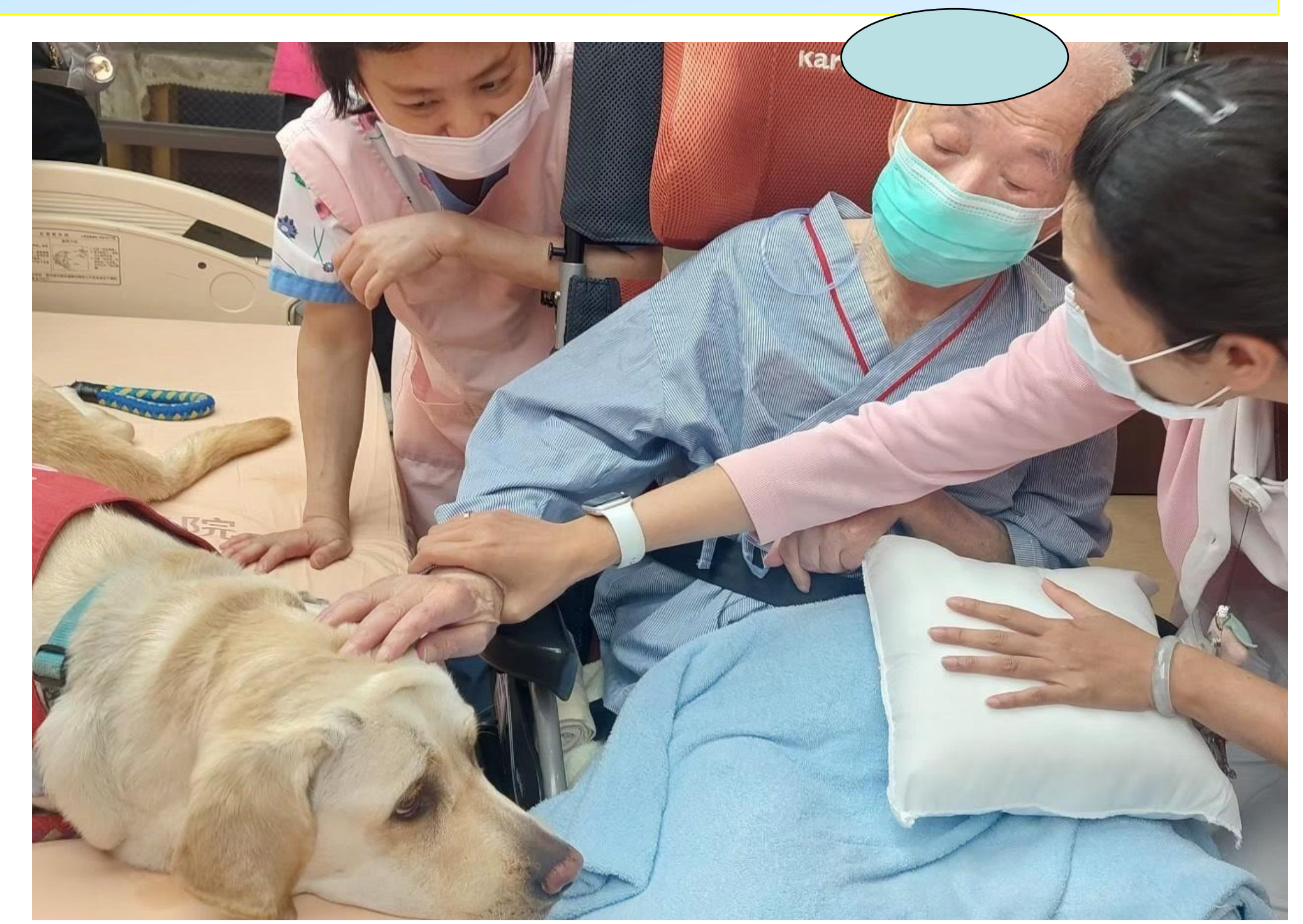
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## Background and objective

In Taiwan, palliative care units have decades of experience using Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) in hospice care. However, residential facilities have no such experience. Most elderly residents in these institutions require care due to inability to perform daily activities, dementia, or disability. This article discusses a resident who had signed a DNR upon admission and had previously kept a pet dog, with which they were inseparable. The resident's family inquired whether the dog could accompany them for a short visit. This led the institution to consider incorporating Animal-Assisted Therapy into their care services to enhance residents' social interaction, sensory stimulation, and overall physical and mental well-being

## Methods / Intervention

Starting from August 2024, animal-assisted therapy interventions were arranged once every two weeks for a duration of two weeks each time, with a total of four sessions, and each activity lasted one hour.



Since the Taiwan Association of Professional Development for Animal-Assisted Therapy currently focuses mainly on canines, therapy dogs were included in this session. The activities invited residents, family members, and the medical and nursing teams who were willing to participate. The process mainly involved observation, touching, and feeding, while the therapist observed the interactions and reactions between residents and the animals, encouraged residents to build relationships with the animals, and accompanied residents in exploring their feelings and experiences. Nurses measured vital signs before and after the activities and conducted assessments using the holistic evaluation form. Social workers assessed residents' interactions based on continuity, attention, comprehension, participation, interactivity, and initiative.

## Results

Between August and September 2024, a total of 14 residents participated throughout, with an average age of 85 years. The residents' persistence, attention, comprehension, participation, interaction, and initiative before and after the activities were 95.23%, 92.85%, 95.23%, 83.33%, 76.19%, and 69.05%, respectively. Both blood pressure and heart rate showed significant decreases, and anxiety and depression were significantly alleviated.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Animal-assisted therapy has a wide range of applications, primarily serving children, the elderly, cancer patients, individuals with autism, those with cognitive impairments, and patients with mental illnesses, among others. Observations show that when animals are present and interact with patients, it is easier for the patients to express their emotions and concerns. Through interactions between residents and animals, it provides a soothing effect on the mind, improving residents' physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functions, and helping them learn life skills. To help prevent or slow down functional decline in residents of long-term care facilities, it is recommended that more such institutions consider trying animal-assisted therapy or incorporating it into regular activities in the future, as it is believed to bring substantial benefits to the residents.