PETS PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT TO OLDER ADULTS LIVING ALONE: RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL POLL ON HEALTHY AGING

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Diminishing cognitive and physical function, worsening psychological symptoms and increased mortality risk and morbidity typically accompany aging. Health needs of the aging population will continue to increase as the proportion of the population aged 50 years and older increases. Pet ownership (PO) has been linked to better health outcomes in older adults, particularly those with chronic health conditions. However, much of the evidence is weak with little known about the contribution of PO to successful aging in community living older adults. This study examines associations between PO and cognitive performance, physical functioning, and psychological status in community living older adults. Participants in the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging (>50 years old, N=378) completed physical functioning, cognitive and psychological testing, and a ten-year PO history. Most participants (89%) had owned pets at some point and 24% currently have pets. Fourteen percent have 1-4 dogs, 12% have 1-4 cats, and 3% have others. PO was lower with older age (p<.001). In regression analysis controlling for age decade, pet ownership within the past 10 years (PO10) independently predicted cognitive function [total verbal learning (p=.04), and short (p=.015) and long (p=.031) delay free recall, ] but not physical function or psychological status. PO was lower in older age groups as was cognitive, physical functional, and psychological status, while PO within the past 10 years was associated with better verbal learning and memory independent of age. Longitudinal analysis is required to disentangle the sequential associations between PO and change in health status over time..

THE EFFECT OF AN ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM ON SELF-REPORTED LONELINESS IN OLDER ADULTS
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The study, funded by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, measured the effect that an artist in residence program (conducted by state-vetted professional teaching artists) had on self-reported loneliness in older adults. All participants were aged sixty years or older and participated in programming in state-funded adult community centers located in fourteen sites throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Artists offered 10 sessions in creating and critiquing art to older citizens in the artists’ respective art forms including performing arts, visual arts and multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary arts. Through pre and post-tests, changes in loneliness were measured using the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale. The data revealed that there was a significant correlation between a self-reported decrease in feelings of loneliness and participation in a program conducted by professional artists. It was proposed that findings from the study could influence the quality of programs provided by state-funded adult community centers in Pennsylvania and increase funding levels to adult community centers throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

SESSION 710 (PAPER)

CANCER AND END-OF-LIFE CARE

CAN PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATE IN ADVANCE CARE PLANNING CONVERSATIONS? A MIXED-METHODS STUDY
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Studies of advance care planning (ACP) in persons living with dementia (PLWDS) are rare. We conducted an intervention development study to adapt an efficacious ACP