

A meaning reconstruction of my pet loss – reflections and suggestions

Panel Discussion 2: Bereavement Care for Facilitating Transformation (Clinical Perspective)
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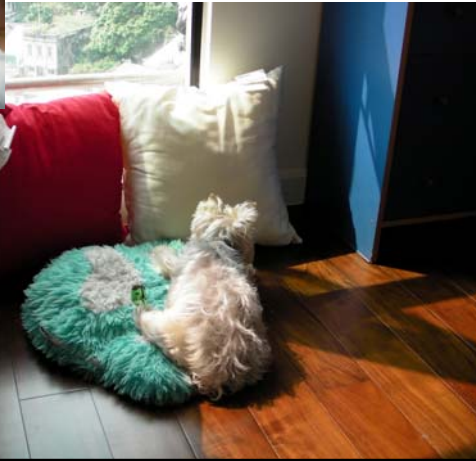
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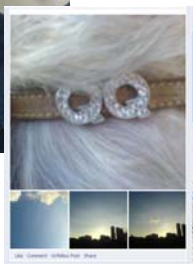
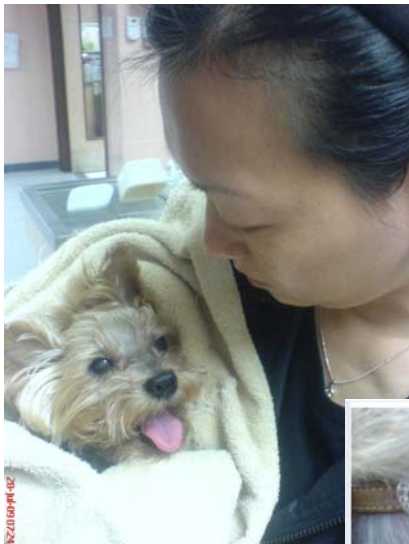
Photo taken in 2007



Photos taken in 2009



His last week in a clinic





What did he take away from us?

Is it better to ask "What did he give us?" instead??

Ming Pao Weekly 2011 02/26, pp.104 - 107

1.

Brit. J. Psychiat. (1977), 131, 21-5

Pathological Mourning after the Death of a Domestic Pet

By KENNETH M. G. KEDDIE

Summary. Pathological bereavement reactions following the death of a close relative or friend have been well documented in the literature. Similar grief reactions have been described following other personal losses, such as the loss of a limb or the loss of one's home.

The cases of three women are described in whom pathological grief followed another category of loss, that represented by the death of a much loved domestic pet. The patients suffered disabling psychiatric symptoms following the death of their pet dogs. The dogs were all of the toy dog variety and had been at least 13 years of age at the time of their death. Institution of psychiatric treatment resulted in rapid recovery and at follow-up after a year there had been no recurrence of symptoms.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely agreed that a man's environment plays a critical part in determining not only his quality of life but also his vulnerability to illness. In a psychological context the most significant aspect of the environment usually concerns a person's relationships with other people. How a man gets on with his particular domestic pet, or pets, may in many cases be equally critical in determining mental equilibrium. This may seem self-evident. Despite this, the valuable contribution that domestic animals can make towards the mental health of the community appears to be largely ignored by contemporary text-books of psychiatry (Batchelor, 1969; Curran *et al.*, 1976; Mayer-Gross *et al.*, 1969; Sims, 1974). In such books it is the relatively rare syndromes pertaining to man's relationship *vis-à-vis* the animal world, such as those of cat phobia (Freeman and Kendrick, 1960) and bestiality (Fish, 1964) that are described.

It is, of course, difficult to assess scientifically the effect that a domestic pet may have on the psyche of any particular individual. Muggford and McComisky (1975), in a recent preliminary study, showed that pets could indeed play a positive psychosocial role in the home. Pensioners living on their own were noted to benefit

in a variety of ways from having a budgerigar as a companion. The group of pensioners who had been given a budgerigar were more outgoing and generally happier compared with those without one. In addition, the budgerigars appeared to have acted as catalytic agents, enabling elderly people to keep in contact with friends, family and local children.

The prophylactic value of pet ownership, from the mental health point of view, will no doubt be confirmed by further studies. Common sense in any case tells us that lonely people in the community are likely to benefit by adopting a domestic animal of one sort or another. This would certainly accord with the views of Gerald Caplan (1964) on primary prevention in psychiatry.

Industrialization has had two alienating effects on Western society. First, urban life has tended to remove people from their natural heritage, the world of flora and fauna. Konrad Lorenz (1958) comments on man's need for the companionship of domestic animals. He describes the particular meaning his own pet dog has for him:

"The pleasure I derive from my dog is closely akin to the joy accorded to me by the raven, greylag goose or other wild animals that enliven my walks through the countryside; it seems like a re-

2. Animal Assisted Intervention in Hong Kong



3.

PROFESSIONAL



Bradley Smith

The 'pet effect'

Health related aspects of companion animal ownership

Health benefit	Benefits to owners	Patients most affected
Physical health	Cardiovascular health³⁴⁻³⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pets can help reduce stress and lower blood pressure (eg. patting a dog or watching fish swim peacefully in an aquarium) Pet owners show improved recovery rates from heart surgery 	Adults and the elderly, in particular those who are stressed, and/or have cardiovascular disease
	Physical fitness (primarily for dog owners)³⁸⁻⁴⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dogs are great exercise partners and provide social support Dog owners are more physically active (primarily through walking dog) and have reduced risk of obesity and better physical health 	All ages, particularly those who are physically unfit or overweight
	Immune system development^{41,42} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to pets lowers the likelihood of developing allergies 	Children
Psychological health	Animal assisted therapy (AAT)^{26,27,28,43,44} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AAT with dogs and/or fish can increase morale, eating habits and overall health in Alzheimer patients AAT increased attendance, decreased violent behaviour, and increased language and social skills in children with ADHD In clinical settings, AAT reduces stress in children 	People of all ages with various disorders
	Mental health^{21,45,46} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owners are less likely to experience loneliness and depression, as pets provide social support (with similar effects to human-human relationships), and provide a sense of purpose Older people with pets are less stressed by major adverse life events than nonpet owners 	Adults (particularly during times of stress or loss of a loved one), the elderly, socially isolated, chronically ill (physical or mental) or those with a terminal illness, and/or physical impairment
	Child development^{47,48} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pets may play a role in the social-emotional development of children, including self esteem, autonomy and empathy for others Children who own pets show increased trust, community feeling, safety, self confidence and self enhancement 	Children and adolescents
Social health	Pets as social enablers^{49,50} <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pets are a good catalyst for meeting people (eg. neighbours, strangers) Other social opportunities, including animal clubs and societies Pet attachment is positively correlated with family cohesion and adaptability Improves social interaction for the elderly and those with Alzheimer disease when used in visiting programs 	People living alone and/or those having difficulty meeting others

4.

Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 2011; 39: 371–388

REVIEW ARTICLE

Nature-assisted therapy: Systematic review of controlled and observational studies

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Abstract

Background: Nature's potentially positive effect on human health may serve as an important public health intervention. While several scientific studies have been performed on the subject, no systematic review of existing evidence has until date been established. *Methods:* This article is a systematic evaluation of available scientific evidence for nature-assisted therapy (NAT). With the design of a systematic review relevant data sources were scrutinised to retrieve studies meeting predefined inclusion criteria. The methodological quality of studies and abstracted data were assessed for intervention studies on NAT for a defined disease. The final inclusion of a study was decided by the authors together. *Results:* The included studies were heterogeneous for participant characteristics, intervention type, and methodological quality. Three meta-analyses, six studies of high evidence grade (four reporting significant improvement), and 29 studies of low to moderate evidence grade (26 reporting health improvements) were included. For the studies with high evidence grade, the results were generally positive, though somewhat ambiguous. Among the studies of moderate to low evidence grade, health improvements were reported in 26 cases out of 29. *Conclusions:* This review gives at hand that a rather small but reliable evidence base supports the effectiveness and appropriateness of NAT as a relevant resource for public health. Significant improvements were found for varied outcomes in diverse diagnoses, spanning from obesity to schizophrenia. Recommendations for specific areas of future research of the subject are provided.

Key Words: *Biophilia, environmental psychology, evidence, horticulture, intervention, mental fatigue, stress*

Conclusion

Symposium on Bereavement: From Treatment to Transformation

The End

Thank You

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