Pet therapy for the elderly is a very effective therapy that helps better people’s quality of life. Throughout my research I have found evidence that pet therapy helps elderly with dementia, Alzheimer’s, mood disorders, and psychotic disorders. Each study and experiment that I read and analyzed I found that each experiment held strong results that pet therapy was a success and helped better the quality of life of the majority participants that participated in the experiment. I also have a firm belief that pet therapy works because I have had a personal experience with it myself. A year ago I was punched in the face by my ex boyfriend and I became extremely depressed after dealing with all of those emotions of thinking you love someone and then being abused by someone who you cared about for four years. After going through that traumatic experience I did not want to have to tell anyone because I did not want to be pitied. So the way I dealt with my emotions was to save up over winter break and work double shifts so I could afford buying a puppy. Buying a puppy was the best therapy I have ever experienced because she gave me unconditional love and helped me to get out of my depressed stage.

Some people do not believe that pet therapy works because some people do not like animals or have had traumatic experiences with them in their past. Also, people who do not think pet therapy works because they have never seen it work because some people do not believe in things unless they see it happen. That is why experiments are being made to prove that pet therapy is effective and helps better everyone’s quality of life. I believe that pet therapy should be in every facility so that every elderly has the
option to go through that therapy and experience something different rather than art and music therapy. Those still have a huge impact on people’s life but it may not always work for everyone. That is why I believe that the elderly should have options.

In the article *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Animal-Assisted Therapy* they went through an experiment with the hypothesis that pet therapy with dogs will result in reducing the stress and psychosomatic symptoms. There was five therapy sessions with 30 adults and they were all divided into a CBT group and a CBT and AAT group. The dogs in each session were present in each setting and showed a present and consistent role in each participant. Each dog was certified and done with therapist that was certified. The study showed that the simple presence of the dog showed an immense amount of reduced stress in each participant. This confirms the hypothesis of the study and what I believe too, which is pet therapy, which helps reduce the stress in adults.

Another article through the Longwood Database, *Using Animal-Assisted Therapy to Facilitate Social Communication*, stated that animals would assist individuals with specific therapeutic goals. Each animal assisted activity would involve animals in activities that are mainly structured, but activities are for the purpose of recreation and enjoyment. AAT is the focus of this investigation, because a live animal was introduced to therapy sessions to facilitate language goals for each participant. Interventions involving animals have been documented in therapy between clinician and child in classrooms, and in non-traditional settings such as water tanks (Esteves & Stokes, 2008; Martin & Farnum, 2002; Nathanson et al., 1997). The animals helped with social communication, is based on the idea that animals can reduce stress and promote social engagement, including language interactions. Beetz said that compared use of a real dog,
toy dog, and friendly human to mediate stress responses in a group of 31 boys with insecure or disorganized attachment. Documentation was found that both quality of social interactions provided promise that animals can be a tool with verbal, social interactions in an educational setting. It was shown in the study that animal use for therapeutic intervention, such as social communication, is based on the idea that animals can help reduce stress and promote social engagement, including language interactions, (Beetz, 2011, p.7). Each participant was allowed to interact with a live dog, toy dog, or friendly human before and after a stressful task. The task was that each patient should present an oral story to a two-person panel followed by completion of a math test. After each participant went through that stressful scenario they came in contact with a real dog and the participants each found a decrease in their cortisol levels. The first hypothesis focused on determining if using AAT would improve verbal, social communication. When examining overall continuations the researchers found that real live dog therapy helped reduce stress in the participants.

*The Power of Wagging Tails* written by Marcus told the readers about an emotional story that he went through as a doctor in a hospital setting. Marcus told a story about his golden retriever Wheatie who went around with him throughout the hospital visiting some of the elderly patients. “This therapy dog is a dog that has been trained, tested and certified to be able to consistently and safely provide comfort and affection to people in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospitals, and schools. A therapy dog needs to be social, engaging, and responsive to contact with strangers. People can engage in unpredictable behavior around dogs, especially when they are sick or confused, or hey are young children unfamiliar with dogs. So the therapy dog first and foremost needs a
temperament that will make visits safe and positive experiences for both the dog and the humans the dog visits” (Marcus, 2011 p.5-6). He was able to share the emotions that each patient had with all of their therapy dogs. The long-lasting comfort patients could get from the brief visits. Marcus told stories about how one patient grew a strong love for Wheatie and how they bonded with Wheaties unconditional love and calm manner he gave each patient. “Do I think Wheatie’s visit affected Lia’s recovery? Absolutely. And while I know Lia’s own inner strength, her medical team, and the treatments she received should be primarily credited for her return to good health, I am blessed to know that those little visits from a shaggy dog made a positive impact and, in some small way, helped Lia return home to her Yorkie with tales to tell of the healing touch of a little pooch” (Marcus, 2011, p.7-8). Wheatie was able to show love in each patient and help prolong some patients’ lives.

The beneficial effect of animal company on persons at any age is well known. Increasing emphasis has also been given to the healthy role of animal company on person affected by both somatic and mental disorders. Pet therapy plays an important role in psychological, educational and physical rehabilitation, and aims to improve the well being of patients as a whole and improve their quality of life. The idea of dogs or other animals as co-therapists, with the role of ‘emotional mediator’ and ‘catalyst’ of a social process, dates back to the 1960s and was introduced by the psychiatrist Boris Levinson, In the late 1970s, the therapeutic use of pets had lost its experimental connotation and nowadays it follows specific operational protocols. The favorable role of pet therapy has been observed, particularly among elderly. The frequent co-occurrence of cognitive and mood disorders, psychotic and anxiety symptoms make elderly persons especially
suitable for treatments based on affective emotional motivation and psychological stimulation. Unfortunately, this therapeutic approach has very little scientific data supporting its effectiveness. This might be a result of difficulties in designing and carrying out research with animals. “Two case-control studies explored the effects of pet therapy on demented elderly patients. One study suggested a beneficial effect on Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) and the other found a statistically significant effect of pet intervention on behavior” (Nepps, 2014, p. 126).

_Pet Therapy With Elderly Patients With Mental Illness_ was a study on older adults that were 65 and older that have been institutionalized for at least 2 months that are being affected by mental illness. Ten people were assigned to a pet therapy groups and 11 subjects to a control group. Each intervention lasted for 6 weeks and took place in the nursing home both indoors and outdoors. Each pet activity lasted for 90 minutes once a week. During each activity the dogs came into contact with all participants. Each patient was required to hold, stroke, walk, talk to and play with the dogs and the control groups were allowed to see the dogs but not allowed to come into contact with them. “Our findings showed that pet therapy improved depressive symptoms in residents in a long-term care facility by 50%. Self-perceived quality of life was also greatly improved” (Morettie, 2011, p.127). Morettie also stated in his finding that, “The beneficial effect of pet therapy on elderly patients affected by different psychiatric disorders further strengthens currently available literature, suggesting a positive influence on depressive symptoms, both in otherwise healthy elderly and in subjects with chronic age-related disabilities” (Morettie, 2011, p.127). I really enjoyed this study because they involved a control group and showed how dog therapy needs to have interactions not just looking.
While reading through all of the articles I found through out the Longwood database I found that all of the research studies have matched up with what I believe. I believe that pet therapy is one of the best therapies to help better people’s quality of life. Each article revealed that in a different way and with different types of studies, which helped convince me more that pet therapy works and helps every type of client. Each population of people can use pet therapy. With it being dog therapy, house therapy, bird therapy and much more. Anyone can use pet therapy and it may not work on everyone but it is proven to be beneficial and it does help better your quality of life.
Work Cited


