

Animal Assisted Interventions

REASONINGS BEHIND THE DECISION TO REPLACE THE TERMINOLOGY ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY WITH THAT OF ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS

If we look back through history, we see that a close relationship between man and various animal species has existed for thousands of years. Furthermore, the employment of domesticated animals in therapeutic programs has been around for quite a while. That said, the extensive, organized and documented use of such techniques is relatively recent. Consequently, if we look at different publications in our field, we find varying terminology describing our profession: canine therapy, co-therapist, animal assisted therapy, etc.

There are many definitions of Animal Assisted Therapy. A.M. Beck says AAT is "therapy that implies the use of animals as therapeutic agents." A.H. Katchner describes it as "the utilization of the therapeutic capacity of contact with animals" and Granger and Kogan go by the Delta Society's definition, which refers to "an intervention that pursues a curative objective and which uses the person-animal bond as an integral part of the treatment process."

As the Delta Society says, Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) – as distinguished from Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) – have as their objective the improvement of the individual's quality of life through the use of the person-animal bond, but are not administered by a therapist and are not documented or evaluated differently from other interaction with animals.

In publications, manuals, articles, lectures and courses on Animal Assisted Therapy, we currently find the following phrases and acronyms referring to the interaction between people and animals:

AAA	Animal Assisted Activities
AAT	Animal Assisted Therapy
AAE	Animal Assisted Education

While drafting the Interventions Protocol for dogs to be used in ITAKA, the psychiatric unit of Barcelona's Sant Joan de Déu Hospital, the following reflections and questions arose:

On one hand, we felt that too many terms are included under the rubric of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), including those from AAI, which had already comprise so-called Animal Assisted Therapies (plural), though in this case from the point of view of the therapeutic interaction with the patient, or "user."

On the other hand, we asked ourselves if we used in the heading the word therapy in its clinical sense, would AAA, AAE or the Resident Programs be out of place under that umbrella? In order to provide an answer to this question, and with the intention of a more specific use of terminology, we proposed substituting the word therapy in the heading Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) with the word interventions, making it Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI), considering that this nomenclature more accurately describes and better comprises the various kinds of interaction between people and animals.

We must keep in mind that this change affects all the abbreviations we will be using from now on. With the use of interventions instead of therapy, the abbreviations or acronyms for the people involved also change. The person previously referred to as the Receiver of Therapy (RT) becomes the Receiver of the Intervention (RI), or the "user" benefitting from the AAI sessions.

The Therapy Professional (TP) becomes the Intervention Professional (IP), the health or education professional whose academic formation and experience has provided him or her with the knowledge for administering interventions.

What was previously called the Assisted Therapy Technician (ATT) becomes the Assisted Intervention Technician (AIT). He or she is the professional responsible for the handling and the physical and emotional wellbeing of the animal before, during and after the AAI sessions. This person's main goal is fostering positive and productive interaction between the RI and the animal.

A new term is that of the Intervention Unit (IU), a pairing made up of an AIT and an individual animal specifically trained and selected for use in an AAI session.

Summing up: **Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI)** are classified according to the professionals involved in the conception, development, execution and evaluation of the session. With that in mind, we divide the AAI in five categories:

AAA – Animal Assisted Activities:

The Intervention Unit (IU) directs the session for one or more users (RIs) with the aim of achieving overall objectives previously established by the team responsible for the group.

In other words, **AAA= IU+RI(s)**.

AAT – Animal Assisted Therapies:

The Intervention Unit (IU) works throughout the session alongside a health professional (IP) so that the dog functions as a facilitator, a motivator or a support mechanism for the Receiver of the Intervention (RI) who then makes progress in an enjoyable and accelerated way toward achieving of the previously established therapeutic objectives.

Included in this rubric are professionals in Psychiatry, Neurology, Psychology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, etc., all those who, according to their degrees and licenses for clinical practice, perform a function designed to achieve agreed-upon objectives. So, **AAT= IU+IP+RI**.

AAE – Animal Assisted Education:

The Intervention Unit (IU) works throughout the session with an education therapist (IP) so that the dog functions as a facilitator, motivator or support mechanism for the RI, who makes progress in an enjoyable and accelerated way toward achievement of the previously established educational objectives.

AAE= IU+IP+RI

AAEv – Animal Assisted Evaluation:

The Intervention Unit (IU) works with the RI's inter-disciplinary team. The team, depending on its focus, takes advantage of the interaction between the RI and the animal to evaluate a diagnosis or treatment program.

Thusly, **AAEv= IU+inter-disciplinary team+RI**.

ARP- Animal Resident Programs (PAR):

The animal resides permanently in a center and takes part in the daily life of the users. This animal is specifically trained as a therapy animal and can participate in other AAls in the same center.

CHART SHOWING THE NEW CLASSIFICATION

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	Intervention name	Participants in the intervention			
		RI	IP	IU	
				AIT	Dog
ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS (AAI)	AAA	X		X	X
	AAT	X	X	X	X
	AAE	X	X	X	X
	AAEv	X	X	X	X
	ARP	X			X