

Attitudes of physiotherapy students towards kynotherapy

Stosunek studentów fizjoterapii do kynoterapii

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Abstract

Introduction: One of the forms of therapy that is designed to enhance effects of physiotherapy is kynotherapy. This study focused on physiotherapy students' opinions on kynotherapy, asking them whether therapy involving a dog may have positive consequences for a patient.

Material and methods: The study was conducted in a group of sixty third-year physiotherapy students studying at L. Rydygier's Collegium Medicum in Bydgoszcz, Poland, and third-year students from the College of Health Sciences in Bydgoszcz. Responses to 20 claims concerning the use of kynotherapy in physiotherapy were obtained, using a written anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire included equal number of positive and negative statements about opinions and knowledge concerning dog-therapy.

Results: Most of the respondents perceive kynotherapy as an effective method supporting rehabilitation. According to physiotherapists this method increases the effects of rehabilitation and may help in breaking the boredom of long-term therapy. In respondents' opinion work with a kynotherapist and his dog improves patients' mobility and enhances the effect of rehabilitation. Besides, activities of this kind are more interesting than the standard treatment. However, kynotherapy cannot be the only method of rehabilitation.

Conclusions: 1. Physiotherapy students' perception of kynotherapy is good. 2. Kynotherapy can be more widely used as one of the valid methods in rehabilitation therapy.

Key words: kynotherapy, dog therapy, therapy with the use a dog, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, animal-assisted therapy

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie: Jedną z form terapii, której cel stanowi wspomaganie działania fizjoterapii, jest kynoterapia. Celem niniejszego badania była ocena opinii studentów fizjoterapii na temat kynoterapii. Studentów zapytano, czy terapia z udziałem psa może przynieść pacjentom korzyści.

Materiał i metody: Badanie przeprowadzono na grupie 60 studentów trzeciego roku fizjoterapii studiujących w Collegium Medicum im. Ludwika Rydygiera w Bydgoszczy oraz studentów trzeciego roku Wyższej Szkoły Nauk o Zdrowiu w Bydgoszczy. Uzyskano opinie na temat 20 twierdzeń dotyczących zastosowania kynoterapii w fizjoterapii na podstawie anonimowego kwestionariusza wypełnianego pisemnie. Kwestionariusz zawierał taką samą liczbę twierdzeń pozytywnych i negatywnych dotyczących opinii i wiedzy na temat terapii z udziałem psa.

Wyniki: Większość respondentów postrzega kynoterapię jako skuteczną metodę pomocniczą w procesie rehabilitacji. Według fizjoterapeutów metoda ta wspiera rehabilitację i może pomóc w przełamaniu znużenia długotrwałą terapią. Zdaniem respondentów praca z kynoterapeutą i psem zwiększa ruchomość pacjenta oraz wzmacnia działanie rehabilitacji. Ponadto terapia tego typu jest dla pacjenta bardziej interesująca niż tradycyjne formy leczenia. Niemniej jednak kynoterapia nie może być jedyną stosowaną formą rehabilitacji.

Wnioski: 1. Studenci fizjoterapii pozytywnie oceniają kynoterapię. 2. Kynoterapia może być szeroko stosowana jako jedna z metod rehabilitacji.

Słowa kluczowe: kynoterapia, dogoterapia, terapia z udziałem psa, fizjoterapia, rehabilitacja, zooterapia

Introduction

The aim of the research was to determine the attitudes of physiotherapists towards kynotherapy. The study was conducted in a group of sixty students of physiotherapy. People

who participated in the survey were asked to answer twenty closed questions concerning the purpose, application and relevance of kynotherapy. Half of the statements were positive and half had a negative connotation. Kynotherapy is a form of therapy that is designed to enhance the effects of rehabilita-



Table 1. Positive statements towards kynotherapy

	Yes [%]	No [%]	No opinion [%]
1. Kynotherapy may improve an efficiency of physiotherapy	97	0	3
2. Kynotherapy is a good way to complement other methods of rehabilitation	97	0	3
3. Kynotherapy may improve social functioning of a patient	97	0	3
4. Exercises with a trained dog improve patients' frame of mind	97	0	3
5. Kynotherapy may improve patients' dexterity	91	0	9
6. Exercises with a trained dog will distract patient's attention from difficulty of these exercises	100	0	0
7. Exercises with a trained dog are more interesting to a patient than rehabilitation conducted at home	97	0	3
8. Exercises with a trained dog improve therapist's interaction with a patient	66	6	29
9. Working with a trained dog may weaken fatigue and boredom connected to long-term rehabilitation	100	0	0
10. Kynotherapy may be applied in all age patients groups	65	6	29

tion and contribute to the development of the personality [1]. The dog, which is working with a patient, is specially trained and holds a valid certificate and his guide is an educated kynotherapist or specialized in kynotherapy physiotherapist. Kynotherapy is a part of an integrated rehabilitation, a process, which aims to restore lost fitness or maintain a certain level of mental and physical performance in people who are temporarily or permanently disabled. The whole process and broadly understood improvement is based on medical knowledge [2]. Physiotherapy students' attitudes towards kynotherapy were examined by analyzing an individual's response to an incident, an object, an idea or a person, arising as a result of direct experience of an individual human being. Attitudes developed under the influence of social environment may affect the opinion of an individual or collective [3]. An attitude is a kind of response of an individual that exists in one's psyche, refers to a particular phenomenon, group, person or fact. A set of judgments that are in the minds of students and affect their current or potential reactions against the world was analyzed [4].

Material and methods

Sixty students of physiotherapy (aged 20-23) were asked to answer twenty questions included in the questionnaire.

Written anonymous survey contained equal number of positive and negative statements concerning judgments and knowledge of kynotherapy. Respondents could select the following answers: yes, no, I have no opinion. While being surveyed participants had the opportunity to ask the surveyor questions, the questionnaires were completed independently. Respondents were not able to consult their answers. As much time as participants needed was devoted to the survey. The project included the following variables: age and sex of the respondents, their previous education, year of participation in the college of physiotherapy, current situation in terms of professional work as physiotherapists and the fact whether the respondents had heard anything about kynotherapy earlier. These variables have been identified on the basis of a written declaration attached to the survey.

Results

Statements with a positive tone were not a problem in the assessment – the vast majority confirmed the raised thesis (tab. 1). Confirming the negatively toned statements is characteristic to a large percentage of people who do not have an opinion on the matter (tab. 2).

Table 2. Negative statements towards kynotherapy

	Yes [%]	No [%]	No opinion [%]
1. Exercises with a trained dog will focus patients' attention mainly to a dog – not to exercises	47	31	22
2. Exercises with a trained dog will cause patients' dislike to ordinary rehabilitation	28	34	38
3. Kynotherapists are not well educated and because of it their work is not efficient	6	50	44
4. Kynotherapy is an amusement, not a therapy	25	37.5	37.5
5. Kynotherapy should be used only if other methods are not efficient at al.	19	65	16
6. Kynotherapy may replace standard rehabilitation	17	66	18
7. Exercises with a trained dog will focus physiotherapist's attention mainly to a dog – not to patients	9	75	16
8. Physiotherapist working with a dog will share time to a patient and a dog and it will weaken his/her efficiency	9	66	25
9. Kynotherapists who are not physiotherapists usually conduct rehabilitation in wrong way	19	40.5	40.5
10. Kynotherapy should be applied only in children	8	63	29

According to the students, kynotherapy may strengthen the effectiveness of physiotherapy. 31 respondents confirmed that kynotherapy complements other methods of improvement and may improve social functioning of patients. Almost all of those questioned have stated that exercises with a trained dog enhance well-being and are more interesting than the standard therapy without a dog (97%). Third of the group have no opinion on whether kynotherapy may increase the mobility of people who exercise, others believe that a therapy with a dog can improve the osteoarticular system. All students have found that the inclusion of a trained therapy dog makes participants more willing to exercise. According to the respondents exercises with trained dog improve the contact between a therapist and a participant as well as may break the fatigue caused by long rehabilitation. According to 65% of students, kynotherapy may be used with all age groups.

Almost half of students believe that activities involving a trained dog make patients focus not on the task, but on the dog. Every third student believes that such actions result in a reluctance to standard therapy. Half of respondents disagreed with the statement that kynotherapists do not have proper education, so that improvement conducted by them is not effective, 44% have no opinion on this issue. Kynotherapy is not a serious therapy – 37.5% disagreed with this opinion, the same number of people did not form an opinion on the subject. 65% of people do not agree with the statement that kynotherapy should be used only in cases where it is not possible to improve the condition of the patient in any other way. Kynotherapy cannot replace the classical treatment in the opinion of 66%. Three out of four respondents do not share the claim that a therapist is focused on the dog rather than on the participants. During kynotherapy a therapist divides his time between the dog and the patient, which reduces the effectiveness of rehabilitation – 65% of people disagreed with this statement; every fourth person has no opinion on the subject. Kynotherapists who are not physiotherapists are wrongly managing therapy – less than half believe that it is a false statement and every fifth person confirms this assertion. Unjust is also the argument that kynotherapy works only with children – say more than a half of those interviewed. Calculated correlations (Pearson's r) showed that there were no connection between independent variables (as age and sex of the respondents, their previous education, year of participation in the college of physiotherapy, current situation in terms of professional work as physiotherapists and the fact whether the respondents had heard anything about kynotherapy earlier) and students' attitudes towards kynotherapy.

Discussion

The study was conducted in order to understand how a group of physiotherapy students sees rehabilitation, in which the main tool and motivator to therapy is the use of specially selected and trained dogs. Physiotherapists' attitudes regarding the advisability of conducting kynotherapy in different age groups were rated. So far, the literature does not address the topic of physiotherapy students' attitudes towards kynotherapy. The aim of this study was to supplement the missing knowledge on that subject. The results of the study suggest that physiotherapy students' attitudes towards kynotherapy are not easy to define. Improvement is a long, multi-faceted process and therefore the benefits of therapeutic work conducted with a dog are difficult to prove scientifically. To be reliable, research would have to be long-term, also it is hard to create uniform groups to compare results of therapy with

dogs and without them [5]. According to physiotherapy students, kynotherapy can strengthen the effectiveness of physiotherapy, as a complement to other methods of improvement. This is consistent with the definition of kynotherapy. Just being around a dog should not be sufficient form of therapy, because a dog itself is not a therapy, it is only a motivation to take a specific action – in this case the motor exercises. So kynotherapy cannot replace standard therapy, as confirmed by 66% of students [1, 6]. Students said that kynotherapy improves mood and is more interesting than a therapy without the presence of any pet. The mere contact with a dog, provided that you like animals and do not suffer from kynophobia, brings many benefits. Talking with parents of children with disabilities one can hear that even a contact with a pet has a positive impact on the development of their children [5]. According to students, a therapy with a specialized dog improves social functioning of patients. Satisfactory level of social functioning can improve all important social activities such as making friends, being in a group or participate in family life [7]. Another research conducted by a group of American scholars suggests that the presence of a dog improves mood by encouraging production of endorphins in the human body. The dog does not judge, does not criticize and treats people without prejudice. After exercises with a dog there are physical benefits as well as mental, which is often very difficult to separate from each other [5].

The dog as an incentive to take a specific action, diverts attention from the difficult exercise, redirecting it to itself. Patients do not focus on the number of repetitions or the complexity of the action, but the dog, who became their motivation, which in turn will improve the mobility [6]. This statement was confirmed by physiotherapy students who were asked about it in the poll. Students believe that thanks to the presence of a dog patient is more likely to exercise, which has a positive impact on improving mobility and such therapy is more interesting, which is confirmed by other researchers [6]. It is not known whether exercises with a trained dog improve contact between a therapist and a patient; however, Levison, a psychologist who was one of the first who examined the effect of a dog therapy on his patients, could confirm this. Levison came to the office with his dog but never used him during sessions with his patients. One day one of the patients came into the office before his therapeutic session which meant that he met the psychologist's dog. The boy began to speak with the dog, which during previous visits therapist could not achieve. This event led Levison to get to study this method of therapy [8]. Students who participated in the study believe that through the work with a trained dog fatigue caused by long-term rehabilitation can be overcome. Unfortunately, the literature lacks studies to confirm or reject this argument. Physiotherapy students believe that kynotherapy can be used with every age group (65%), not only with children (62%), although activities of this type are most liked by children. Kynotherapy is carried out successfully with every age group. Dogs enhance motor development, mental and intellectual development in people with all sorts of disorders [1, 6, 9]. Dogs are participating successfully in therapies for patients with cancer [10], visiting the elderly in their homes and nursing homes, helping to motivate patients to take simple steps such as dressing up [11], also they are active in the process of rehabilitation carried out in prisons [12]. The survey asked whether activities involving a trained dog make exercisers not focus on exercise, but the dog. Almost half of the people agree with this statement. PTK standards say that if the therapist is not an educated physiotherapist, he must provide a specialist in the field of rehabilitation while doing physical exercises with the patient. During the course of therapy with a dog when a pa-

tient is not very physically fit extra help is required. In addition to a physiotherapist, who watches over the proper course of the therapy, the dog's guide, or a kynotherapy assistant is present. This action is intended to carry out a proper treatment. Kynotherapy canon states that the concentration of attention on the dog is not wrong, the dog is to be the motivator to take therapeutic action and kynotherapist's task is to ensure that the therapy was successful and was focused on rehabilitation goal and that dog is supporting the patient [13, 14]. Study asked whether activities involving a trained dog cause reluctance to standard therapy or not. The study did not give a clear answer to this subject, there are no references to this issue in literature as well. Half of those interviewed did not agree with the hypothesis that kynotherapists do not have adequate education and therefore their therapy is not effective. Requirements to be a kynotherapist are to be completed in postgraduate studies or vocational course during which necessary qualifications are obtained. During classes kynological, medical and methodological knowledge about Down syndrome, CP and MS is acquired. The program of study is methodology of working with people with ADHD, working with the elderly, developmental disabilities, mental disabilities, etc. The course and studies end with an exam that verifies the preparation for the profession. This action positively affects the ability to prepare kynotherapists [15, 16]. Some communities still believe that kynotherapy is not a serious therapy. This problem was already acknowledged by Levison in the first results of his observations on the effects of therapy with a dog on a man presented in 1961. Some people within the psychiatric community has referred to the results critically. Despite research

on the effects of therapy with a dog on the area of human physical and mental health conducted eg. by the Delta Society – the largest international organization dealing with the subject of therapeutic work with animals – many medical communities still do not recognize kynotherapy as a serious therapy [8]. According to physiotherapy students who participated in the study one should use kynotherapy not only in cases where it is not possible to improve the condition of the patient in any other way. It can be used in all cases, of course, in the absence of contraindications for this type of therapy [13, 14].

Conclusions

1. Kynotherapy can accelerate and enhance the rehabilitation, improve motor and social functioning of patients, but it cannot replace the standard rehabilitation.
2. Exercises with a dog are more interesting than the standard therapy conducted only in the patient's home. Patients are more willing to practice when motivated by a dog.
3. According to the students of physiotherapy, kynotherapy can be used with every age group and the activities involving a dog can overcome fatigue caused by long-term rehabilitation.
4. Kynotherapy cannot replace the standard therapy, but as an integrated element of the standard therapy can strengthen and broaden the benefits of physical and mental health.

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