

ZOOTHERAPY MUCH MORE THAN PETS

Definition

Zootherapy is the intervention methodology for humans, which involves the participation of animals without harming them. It has the aim of preventing, recovering, and treating physical and psychological diseases or improving the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functions of healthy people.

Objectives

1. Expand the knowledge of zootherapy and the medical, cognitive, and social advantages that entails the relationship between humans and animals.
2. Know the regulation of these practices, the codes, and laws that protect animals and the standards of some local organizations.

Therapy

- Rehab
- Hospitals
- Education

APPLICATIONS

Activities

- Prisons
- Schools - Bullying
- Gender violence victims
- Nursing homes

Problems

LEGISLATION

There are no national laws controlling zootherapy practices. The existent legislation only applies individually to the autonomous communities, and most of them do not have any legal document that penalizes malpractice against animals in these activities. Ethical codes and protocols only protect animals for professional actions that suffer from the personal interpretation and the "Animal Protection Law". However, it does not include zootherapy; correctly, it could be applied. The Veterinary Code of Ethics and the European Code of Veterinary Conduct, even though they are not mandatory, can lay the foundations for proper professional practice.

WELL-BEING

Social interactions with humans have been described as significantly stressful for dogs, which leads to questioning animal welfare in zootherapy. There is excellent heterogeneity in types of sessions, sampling, subjects, duration, objectives, and proceeding. This, together with the limited research and the minimal concern and awareness of the supervisors, makes it impossible to establish universal guidelines to follow. The unconditional obedience of these animals can make undetectable the warning signs, which makes the animal's behavior individual and of subjective interpretation, and forces the supervisors to deeply know the dog's character, in order to recognize stress situations.

CONCLUSIONS

Zootherapy looks for improving the quality of the life of people with physical or psychological difficulties or people in situations of social risk.

The scientific evidence supporting the use of zootherapy is extensive, but with very variable study designs, and it becomes difficult to interpret the results.

No regulation controls these practices universally. It would be necessary to create and periodically review laws that could regulate these activities, and also it would be necessary to unify the animal health monitoring and control systems to ensure their welfare.

