

Pet Therapy and Resilience



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ABSTRACT

Nurses are consistently in high-stress working conditions and exposed to direct insults caring for the critically ill. Nurse-related stress and burnout threaten nurses' mental well-being and contribute to turnover. Workload and nurse resilience are the focus of our frontline intensive care unit nurses. The project aimed to improve resilience among nurses and the healthcare team in an inpatient Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) and implement an evidence-based strategy to enhance resilience.

INTRODUCTION

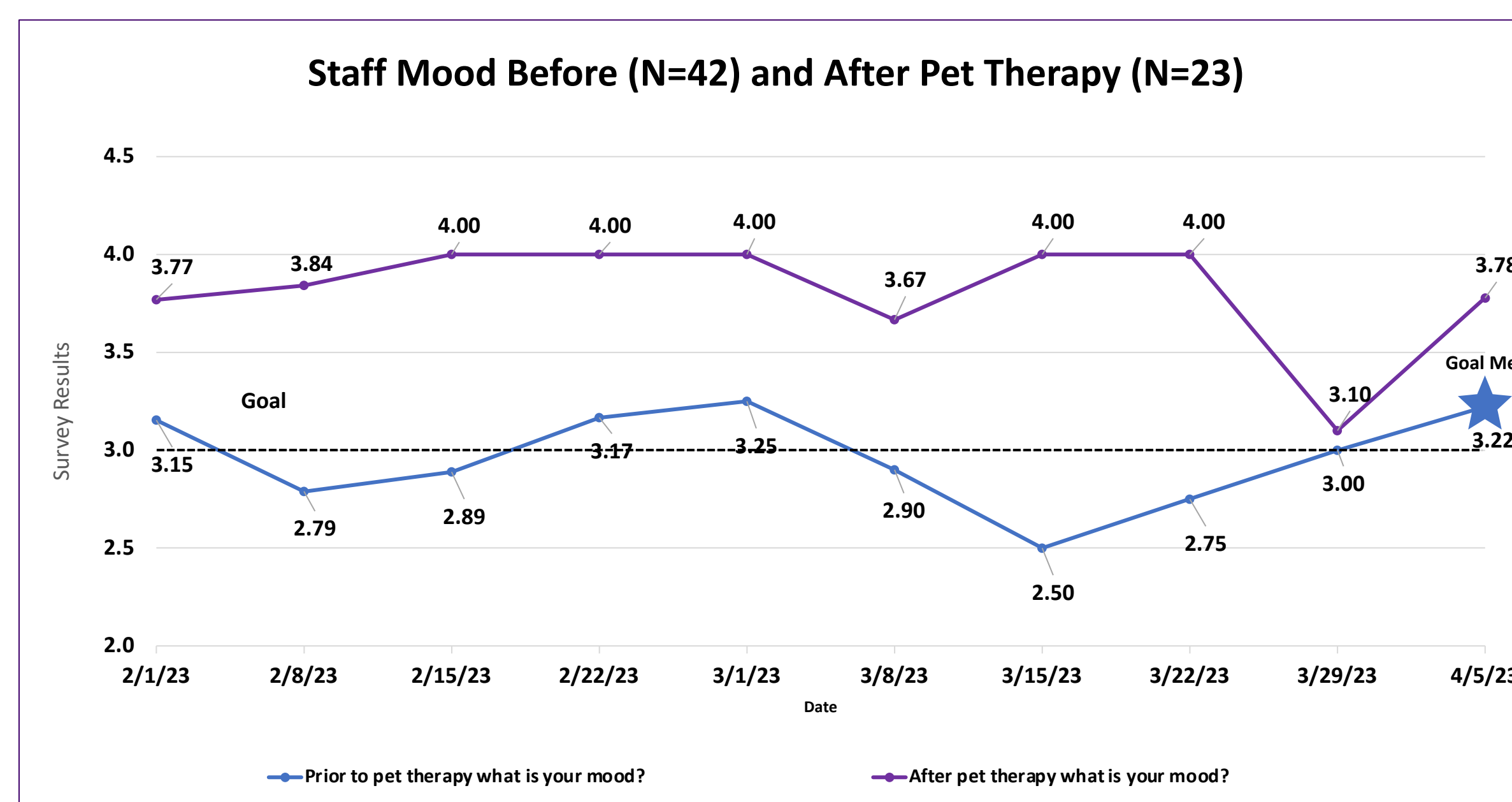
- Nurse-related stress and burnout threaten nurses' mental well-being and resilience which contributes to turnover. Focusing on team members' resilience is a priority. There is a need to create a therapeutic environment for nurses to enhance moral resilience.
- Therapy dogs provide positive therapeutic experiences in stressful hospital environments. They help to reduce anxiety and promote positive coping for patients, families, and team members.
- Currently, there are no pet therapy visits scheduled in the adult hospital.
- The purpose of this project was to develop a dog therapy program to decrease workplace stress and improve staff resilience by 10% on the Medical Intensive Care Unit by September 2023.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This project was designed to develop a weekly dog therapy program in the MICU tranquility room adjacent to the unit to improve mood and increase staff resilience measured by using a developed survey tool with specific resilience questions post-intervention.

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

- A pre-survey was offered before the implementation of the pet therapy sessions, and the responses showed higher resilience scores in males and staff with less than one year of service.
- The staff mood scores increased after each pet therapy visit, supporting this project's findings that pet therapy positively impacts employee well-being and increases resilience.
- The post-implementation survey tool results showed higher resilience scores overall, except in 3 of the 5 resilience questions for the staff in the 5-10 years of service category.
- Although attendance in pet therapy was lower on the days that the MICU census was higher (22-24 patients), the after-pet therapy mood scores remained positive.
- Note: Survey responses that did not have unique identifiers, did not work in MICU, and did not participate in pet therapy were removed from the total number of responses collected.



DISCUSSION

- Feedback from team members and other leaders participating in the pet therapy visits was upbeat throughout the project.
- Team members noted that the program stimulated social interaction and enhanced the atmosphere when taking a break to participate in pet therapy.
- Attendees appreciated that this project was explicitly offered to employees to improve staff resilience.
- Observational data captured during the pet therapy visits included many other team members routinely participating in pet therapy not currently working within the MICU.
- Resilience scores were consistent with the verbal appreciation expressed by the team members.
- This project should have attempted to quantify patient outcomes related to nurse resilience. This is an area for future study.
- Notably, the results encourage pursuing the sustainability of pet therapy and other well-being plans for team members.



CONCLUSION

- Organizational activities promote healthy work conditions, maximize the integration for well-being and building moral resiliency.
- Pet therapy is one of many strategies to promote a healthy work environment and improve resilience.
- This project was deemed a success by the Registered Nurses working the Medical Intensive Care Unit.
- There is a need to extend this program throughout the health care system with the development of a program designed specifically for forward facing staff.



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