

ANIMAL THERAPY BENEFITS ON HEALTHCARE WORKERS

PROVIDED BY: MONASH HEALTH LIBRARY**DATE:** 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

Please find following a summary of a literature search and relevant results. All articles can be provided in full - email library@monashhealth.org for a list of the articles you require.

QUESTION

The benefits of the use of canine's to support the wellbeing of healthcare staff and whether this then leads to better client outcomes.

RESULTS

ONLINE RESOURCES (GREY LITERATURE)

GUIDELINES & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION DOCUMENTS

Animal Assisted Intervention International. (2019). **Animal assisted intervention international standards of practice.** [Link.](#)

Section 1: Standards of Practice for the Health, Welfare and Well-being of Dogs; Section 2: Standards of Practice for the Dog Handler; Section 3: Standards of Practice for the Ethical Treatment and Welfare of Participants; Section 4: Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Therapy; Section 5: Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Activity; Section 6: Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Education and Section 7: Standards of Practice for the Administration of Programs

Royal College of Nursing. (2019). **Working with dogs in health care settings.** [Link.](#)

The aim of this protocol is to highlight the precautions that should be taken when dogs are brought into various health care settings and to provide clear guidance on all reasonable safeguards that should be put in place to protect residents, patients, visitors and staff. This protocol covers the role of both the dog and the owner/handler, and includes information that all organisations should take into account before allowing a dog to access their premises other than a personal assistance dog such as a guide dog.

Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control. (2016). **Position statement: Animal visits in healthcare facilities.** [Link.](#)

All healthcare facilities (HCF) should develop a policy for assistance animals that complies with Commonwealth, State and local council legislation.

NSW Health. (2012). **Animal visits and interventions in public and private health services in NSW.** [Link.](#)

The purpose of the guideline is to outline protocols for implementing and supporting assisted animal visits and interventions for patients in NSW public and private health facilities in NSW.

THESIS

Foith. (2017). **Therapy dogs and the impact on employees in the pediatric medical setting.** [Link](#). Our hypothesis is that regular interaction with the therapy dog, will improve employee productivity, job satisfaction, and reduce employees perceived stress. Our research question is “Does regular interaction with a therapy dog positively impact employees?” Although statistical significance was found with regards to the therapy dog’s involvement, the risk of a Type I Error exceeded the number of factors identified. An analysis of the potential factors associated with the findings and limitations of the work will be presented.

PEER-REVIEWED LITERATURE – MOST RECENT FIRST

Articles are grouped as follows:

- Burnout
- Nursing
- Acute Care Enviroments
- Facility Dogs
- Animal Assisted Interventions

Each article summary contains excerpts from the abstract and an online link.

BURNOUT

J. Gerson, et al. (2023). **Paws to care: Implementation of a novel medical dog office hours program to foster pediatric health care staff resilience and joy.** *Clinical Pediatrics*, 62(8), 849-855. [Click to request full text.](#)

Burnout and resiliency are significant challenges among health care workers. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) has shown to improve patient-level outcomes; however, AAT research involving hospital staff is limited. Our novel Medical Dog ("MD") Office Hours Program aimed to provide support to pediatric hospital staff and explore the program's impact on burnout. Participant surveys described work role and years of experience, well-being, and emotional/physical descriptions and symptoms. Of 149 participants, 85% endorsed baseline distress/burnout; nearly half had at-risk Well-Being Index scores. Compared with baseline, postintervention participants endorsed significantly fewer negative (more positive) emotions; greater feelings of comfort and energy; and decreased tiredness and pain ($P < .0001$). Readiness to return to work scores were high ($M = 78.1$, $SD = 18.4$). Our Medical Dog ("MD") Office Hours Program resulted in improvements in emotional descriptions and physical symptoms among pediatric health care staff. Leveraging AAT among health care staff may help mitigate burnout and increase resiliency.

K. Rodriguez, et al. (2021). **The effects of facility dogs on burnout, job-related well-being, and mental health in pediatric hospital professionals.** *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 30(9-10), 1429-1441. [Click to view full text.](#)

For work-related burnout, working with a facility dog was associated with higher perceived personal accomplishment, but had no effect on emotional exhaustion. With respect to job perceptions, working with a facility dog was associated with more positive job descriptions and lower intention to quit, but not with perceptions about co-workers or workplace social support. Finally, in relation to mental health, working with a facility dog was associated with more positive emotions, better perceived mental health and less depression, but had no effect on anxiety.

Findings suggest that facility dogs may be related to several benefits for healthcare professionals' work-related burnout, job perceptions and mental health, but that they do not influence all components of these areas.

B. Etingen, et al. (2020). **Developing an animal-assisted support program for healthcare employees.** *BMC Health Services Health Services Research*, 20(1), 1-9. [Click to view full text.](#)

Employee burnout and its associated consequences is a significant problem in the healthcare workforce. Workplace animal therapy programs offer a potential strategy for improving employee well-being; however, research on animal therapy programs for healthcare workers is lacking. This study aimed to evaluate the feasibility, acceptability and preliminary impact of an animal-assisted support program to improve healthcare employee well-being. Qualitative findings suggested that employees were highly satisfied with the program, noticed an improved clinic atmosphere, and experienced a reduction in stress and boost in mood. Establishing an animal-assisted support program for employees in a busy healthcare clinic is feasible and acceptable. Our pilot data suggest that animal-assisted programs could be a means to boost mood and decrease facets of burnout among healthcare employees.

J. Kline, et al. (2020). **Randomized trial of therapy dogs versus deliverative coloring (art therapy) to reduce stress in emergency medicine providers.** *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 27(4), 266-275. [Click to view full text.](#)

Cognitive stress during shift work contributes to burnout in emergency department (ED) workers. We hypothesize that if physicians and nurses interact with a therapy dog for 5 minutes while on ED shift, both their perceived and their manifested stress levels will decrease. This randomized controlled clinical trial demonstrates preliminary evidence that a 5-minute therapy dog interaction while on shift can reduce provider stress in ED physicians and nurses.

K. Van Ryzin, et al. (2019). **Canines in the emergency department: A novel approach to stress reduction in emergency medicine providers.** *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 26(S1), S9-S304. [Click to view full text.](#)

S145. Cognitive stress during shiftwork contributes to burnout in emergency care providers. We hypothesize that if emergency care physicians and nurses interact with a therapy dog, their stress levels will decrease. The present design found no statistically significant reduction in provider stress/anxiety reduction with exposure to a therapy dog compared with art therapy. The requirement for the provider to leave the work environment to see the dog may have increased provider stress. A design that allows a therapy dog "on demand" at the convenience of providers may show a larger effect on reduction in emergency care provider stress.

P. Ginex, et al. (2018). **Animal-facilitated therapy program: outcomes from caring canines, a program for patients and staff on an inpatient surgical oncology unit.** *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 22(2), 193-198. [Click to view full text.](#)

Animal-facilitated therapy (AFT) is a complementary medicine intervention. The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of an AFT program on patients and staff on a surgical oncology unit. A quasiexperimental design was used for the patient group, and a pre-/post-test design was used for the staff group. The intervention involved the AFT program being fully integrated on a surgical inpatient unit. Outcomes included patient-reported symptoms and quality-of-life (QOL) outcomes for patients, as well as professional QOL for staff. QOL indicators improved for all patients, and the level of energy at follow-up was significantly higher in the AFT group after adjusting for baseline. For staff, compassion satisfaction was high and burnout was low.

P. J. Bayley, et al. (2018). **Wellness interventions for medical residents – do animals beat machines?** *Global Advances in Integrative Medicine and Health*, 1(7), 1-285. [Click to view full text.](#)

Physician burnout contributes to workplace stress and has been shown to negatively impact patient care. One underutilized potential avenue for improving physician wellness is break time. Recognizing the benefits of therapy animals, health-care facilities now offer these services to staff. Pet Assisted

Wellness at Stanford (PAWS) is a group of volunteer owners and dogs that regularly visits inpatients and may also be available to staff. Together, these preliminary findings suggest that while the PAWS condition increased arousal (possibly due to the excitement of the dogs and the dynamic change to the work environment), it had positive effects on overall well-being.

NURSING

J. A. Coto, et al. (2022). **A correlational study exploring nurse work anxiety and animal-assisted therapy.** *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 52(9), 498-502. [Click to view full text.](#)

Nurses experience work anxiety with chronic stressful situations, high-acuity assignments, and rigorous patient care standards. The purpose of this study was to determine whether animal-assisted therapy during active worked hours would reduce nurse work-related anxiety. This prospective study has shown that nurse work anxiety significantly decreased during worked hours of active bedside care when the nurses actively engaged with a therapy dog.

D. Anderson, et al. (2021). **The effect of animal-assisted therapy on nursing student anxiety: A randomized control study.** *Nurse Education in Practice*, 52(1), 1-7. [Click to view full text.](#)

Nursing student stress has a major impact on academic performance and testing anxiety is one prominent source. This study evaluated the influence of dogs in decreasing student anxiety at a nursing program prior to a medication dosage calculation exam. A brief interaction with therapy dogs prior to a medication calculation exam decreased anxiety in a convenience sample of nursing students. This study adds empirical knowledge to the field of animal-assisted therapy and nursing student anxiety-coping methods.

Monash Health Library

J. Jones-Schenk. (2020). **Animal-assisted support: Actional intervention for burnout.** *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 51(11), 496-497. [Click to view full text.](#)

The impact of long shifts, the puzzling illnesses and manifestations of COVID-19, its personal and family impacts, and the sustained grief of many losses in the past 6 months requires consideration of interventions to lift caregivers' spirits. Burnout has long been a challenge for nurses working in intense acute environments. Today, the risk and effects are even greater. Animal-assisted support is one intervention that shows some promise in supporting employee well-being.

K. Machova, et al. (2019). **Canine-assisted therapy improves well-being in nurses.** *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(19), 1-11. [Click to view full text.](#)

As nursing is one of the most stressful occupations worldwide, its management warrants more attention to identify possible ways to cope with its pressures. This study aims to evaluate whether animal-assisted therapy (AAT) with the presence of a dog affects the stress level of nurses.

ACUTE CARE ENVIRONMENTS

H. Mash, et al. (2021). **Dog therapy for staff in a pediatric emergency department: A quality improvement project.** *Canadian Journal of Emergency Nursing*, 44(3), 31-37. [Click to view full text.](#)

Recent surveys of our pediatric emergency department staff showed a decrease in staff morale related to increased stress, indicating the need for intervention. Animal-assisted therapy has been shown to have multiple other positive effects in various populations including decreased stress and anxiety reduction. Our existing dog therapy program was unpredictable and inconsistent, resulting in limited staff involvement. The purposes of this project were to determine whether a consistently offered dog therapy program in our pediatric emergency department would be utilized by staff and to elicit staff feedback on the program. A therapy dog was scheduled for one hour twice weekly for

staff to visit when they were available. All staff in the ED were encouraged to attend these sessions. Staff were able to participate in dog therapy more often during the project than prior to project implementation, meeting the overall goal of providing more accessible dog therapy to staff. The program was well-received and has now become a standard offering for our emergency department staff.

N. Canon, et al. (2021). **Pups assisting wellness for staff (P.A.W.S.): Evaluating the impact of canine-assisted interventions on critical care staff wellness.** *Healthcare Management Forum*, 34(2), 199-122. [Click to request full text.](#)

Acute care settings can expose staff to job-related stressors. Pups Assisting Wellness for Staff (P.A.W.S.) has been designed as an innovative approach to support acute care staff in the emergency department and intensive care unit. Results throughout the project demonstrated a positive impact on staff morale, staff stress, overall and staff satisfaction, and a strong desire for the project to continue.

K. Abrahamsonm et al. (2016). **Perceptions of a hospital-based animal assisted intervention program: An exploratory study.** *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 25(1), 150-154. [Click to view full text.](#)

Research has shown that there are multiple benefits of animal assisted interventions for patients. However, the impact of interaction with these animals in staff is understudied, particularly in the acute care setting, and is thus a novel contribution to the literature on human-animal interaction. The purpose of this qualitative pilot study was to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the experiences and perceptions of hospital staff who have participated in a hospital-based animal assisted intervention program. Nine face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted (4 staff nurses, 3 support staff members, and 2 hospital volunteers). Five themes emerged from the respondent interviews: (1) descriptions of the therapy dogs; (2) contacts with the dogs at work; (3) connection with the dogs outside of work; (4) benefits; (5) drawbacks. Our findings reflect abundantly positive hospital staff experiences.

FACILITY DOGS

K. E. Rodriguez, et al. (2022). **Perspectives on facility dogs from pediatric hospital personnel: A qualitative content analysis of patient, family, and staff outcomes.** *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 46(1), 1-8. [Click to view full text.](#)

An increasing number of children's hospitals feature full-time resident facility dogs, which are specially trained to work alongside pediatric healthcare professionals to improve the patient experience. This qualitative study aimed to describe the role that facility dogs play in the lives of patients, families, and hospital staff. Facility dogs were described to benefit pediatric healthcare professionals' daily lives through improving stress and wellbeing, staff relationships, and job-related morale. Negative impacts included increased burdens and responsibilities in the workplace. Facility dogs were also described to benefit patients and families by helping build rapport, providing a comforting presence and positive resource, and normalizing the hospital environment. In conclusion, facility dog programs were found to be a promising complementary intervention to benefit both staff as well as patients and families. Future research is warranted to examine short-term and long-term implications of facility dog programs for staff, patient, and family wellbeing.

S. Riley-Fuller, et al. (2020). **Improving patient and relative experience and staff morale in critical care through animal assisted therapy.** *Journal of the Intensive Care Society*, 21(2), 1-225. [Click to view full text.](#)
p. 55, 0098.

While evidence/feedback is largely anecdotal, this, along with seeing first-hand the impact Maggie has had on our patients, relatives and staff has clearly helped us achieve our objective. Thinking outside the box to help us 'humanise' the ICU and bring some normality to a stressful and worrying environment has been one of our biggest achievements. Above all we have improved our patient and relatives experience and given them something to look forward to while with us on ICU.

M. J. Norton, et al. (2018). **Improving healthcare professionals' well-being through the use of therapy dogs.** *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*, 18(3), 203-209. [Click to request full text.](#)

The Cushing/Whitney Medical Library on the Medical Campus of Yale University provides the healthcare community with the information services critical to training students and informing doctors. The library has been changing due to the decreased dependence on print materials while its role as a place to study, socialize, and relax has increased in importance. Research shows that healthcare professionals experience significantly higher levels of stress anxiety and depression than the general population. The library has the opportunity to reinvent itself not only as a place to study and socialize but also a place that provides opportunities for relaxation and stress reduction through opportunities such as a therapy dog program.

S. Emsden, et al. (2018). **How much is that doggy in the PICU? The role of a registered therapy dog in paediatric intensive care.** *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 103(Suppl 1), A1-A212. [Click to view full text.](#)

Alfie is a therapy dog registered with Pets As Therapy UK, he has been assisting the critical care team in communicating with children and their families. He also has sessions whereby staff members who need help and support coping with stressful situations can spend time with him. Alfie also frequently visits the PICU and wards at the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and offers support to numerous children undergoing treatment. In order to assess how the information booklet was perceived and the impact that Alfie's sessions have had on individuals we handed out feedback questionnaires to families and staff. The feedback was universally positive, leading to the conclusion that a registered therapy animal can be beneficial to both staff and patients in a PICU setting.

ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS

B. Lopian, et al. (2023). **Implementing animal assisted care with dogs and aquatic therapy with a fish tank on wheels for patients and healthcare workers.** *American Journal of Infection Control*, 51(7), S9. [Click to view full text.](#)

The human-animal interaction can positively impact patients and hospital team members socially, emotionally, and physiologically. Establishing animal and handler guidelines and considering infection prevention practices provide a safe environment. At a 928-bed acute care hospital, a team including Infection Prevention, an experienced registered nurse and certified dog trainer and Child Life Director successfully implemented an animal assisted care program with dogs. Additionally, Child Life services has implemented mobile aquatic therapy to bring comfort to patients and team members. Animal assisted care through dogs and fish challenged some of infection prevention's rigid traditions, elevated patient experience, and encouraged team member wellbeing.

H. L. Abraham. (2023). **Animal-assisted activity for clinicians.** *Workplace Wellness: From Resiliency to Suicide Prevention and Grief Management*, pp. 79-89. [Click to view full text.](#)

Studies have shown that interaction with animals can improve physical and emotional well-being, assist in management of stress, promote resilience, promote healthy aging, promote social engagement, and strengthen communities. One theory of how human-animal interaction exerts these influences is by the release of oxytocin, a hormone that triggers several positive physical and psychological changes in humans. Interactions with animals are not without risk, but with proper

planning and precautions human–animal interaction is generally safe and beneficial. The benefits of human–animal interaction can be harnessed to positively impact wellness of health sciences students and in the workplace to improve healthcare employee well-being. The use of animal-assisted activity to intentionally stimulate oxytocin release can facilitate the difficult conversations often required in health care.

T. C. Erren. (2023). **Rudolph, the kids’ ward reindeer: A scoping review of the effects of support animals on the well-being of health care staff.** *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology*, 18(28), 1-11. [Click to view full text.](#)

Our objective was to explore the evidence regarding effects of animal assisted activity on a further population of interest; namely, healthcare staf. We asked the question “how do support animals in healthcare settings affect the well-being of healthcare staf?” As an addendum, we were also interested in what - possibly more unique - animals have visited healthcare settings at Christmas time in particular. Overall, animal assisted activities appear to be well-received by staf and there do not seem to be negative impacts on staf well-being. Our review suggests that, but not exactly how, animal assisted activity benefits staf. Gaps in hard-fact-evidence should not deter us – especially at the festive season – to encourage work with, and systematic research regarding, support animals that provide warmth, empathy, comfort, and more in healthcare settings

D. A. Maran, et al. (2022). **Animal-assisted intervention and care workers’ psychological health: A systematic review of the literature.** *Animals*, 12(3), 1-15. [Click to view full text.](#)

Healthcare settings have recently increased the use of companion animals in the workplace to provide emotional support to people with disabilities, but there is limited empirical research on the effects of these programs on healthcare workers. However, it is reasonable to speculate that Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAIs) may have positive effects on health care workers (HCWs) by buffering the negative effects of work-related stress and other occupational psychosocial risk factors. The aim of this review was to examine the beneficial effects of AAIs on the psychological well-being of HCWs. A systematic review was conducted in December 2021 to gain insight into the positive effects of pets on HCWs in the workplace. Searches were conducted in the following databases: Scopus, PubMed/Medline, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, including studies between 2001 and December 2021, and 12 articles were included in the review. The results indicate that implementing the AAI program in a busy clinic is feasible and that the program is accepted by medical professionals because of the immense psychological benefits it provides. However, the healthcare professionals disliked the experimental design that forced them to leave their workplaces at a certain time.

S. Brown, et al. (2020). **Effects of animal-assisted activity on mood states and feelings in a psychiatric setting.** *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 26(6), 555-567. [Click to request full text.](#)

Research has shown that animal-assisted activity (AAA) effectively improves physiological, psychological, emotional, and social well-being in various environments. To identify how AAA affects mood states and feelings among both patients and staff on inpatient psychiatric units. Significant changes were observed pre- and postexposure to AAA sessions with a therapy dog. Negative moods decreased, and positive moods increased as measured by the Visual Analog Mood Scale. Content analysis identified themes of feeling happy, feeling relaxed, and feeling calm. This research expands scientific evidence associated with AAA by identifying changes in mood states and feelings among individuals in a psychiatric setting.

APPENDIX

SEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematic search was conducted for literature. The results were screened by librarians using [Covidence](#).

SEARCH LIMITS

- English-language
- Published within the last 10 years

DATABASES SEARCHED

- Medline – index of peer reviewed articles across health sciences and medicine.
- Embase – index of biomed and pharmacological peer reviewed journal articles.
- Emcare – index of nursing, allied health, critical-care medicine and more.
- Grey literature – Google, Google Scholar, Trip database

SEARCH TERMS

Concept	MeSH headings	Keywords
Animal Assisted Therapy	Animal Assisted Therapy, Dogs, Service Animals.	Dog, Pet, Canine, Animal [within 3 words of] Therapy, Intervention, Support.
Healthcare Workers	Exp Health Personnel, Exp Allied Health Occupations, Exp Hospitals	Employee, Staff, Hospital, Worker, Professional, Clinician, Personnel [within 3 words of] Wellbeing, Well-being, Morale, Mental Health, Wellness
Not Animal Hospitals	Hospitals, Animal, exp Veterinary Medicine	Veterinary

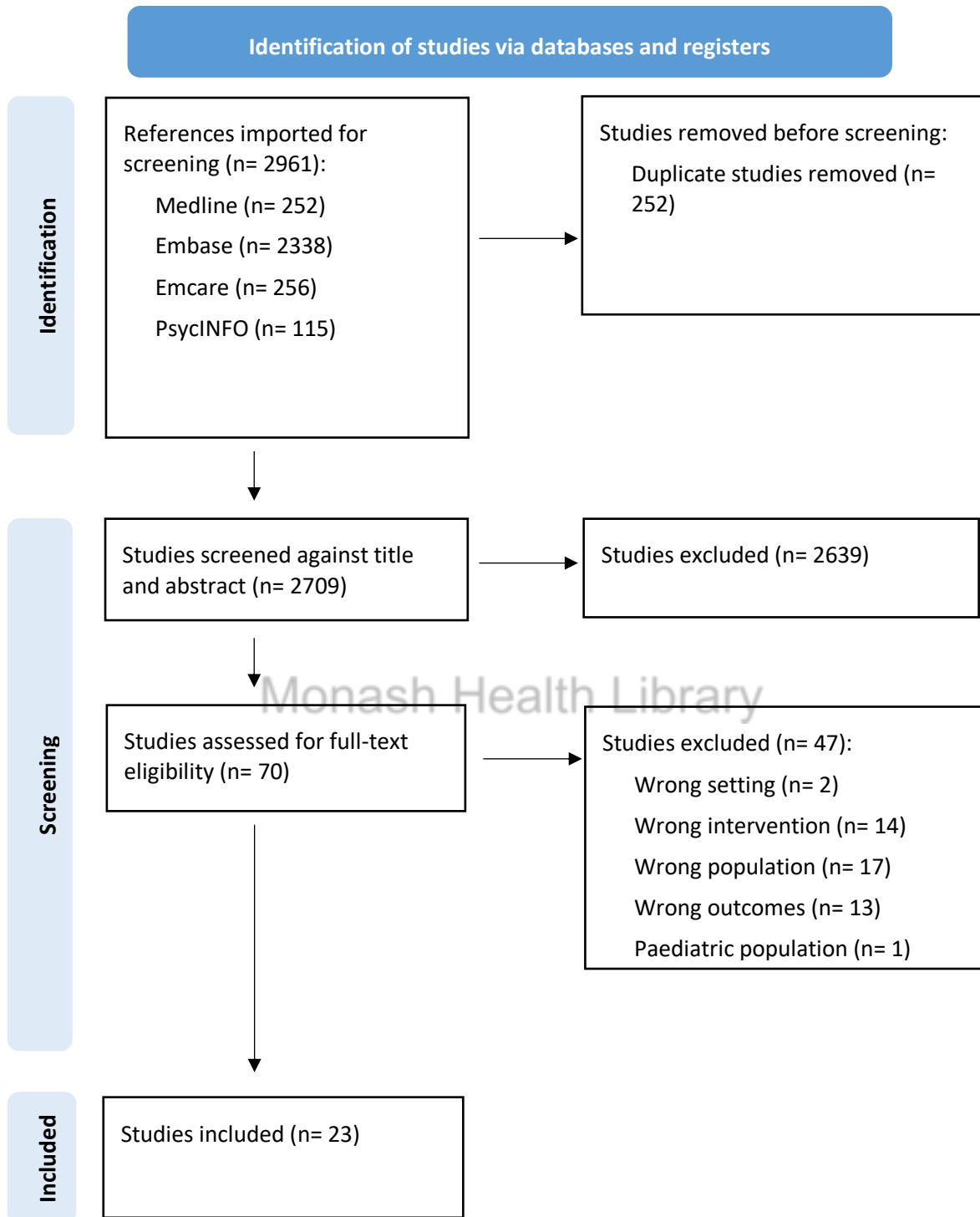
MEDLINE SEARCH STRATEGY

Ovid MEDLINE(R) ALL <1946 to August 29, 2024>

- 1 ((dog* or pet* or canine* or animal*) adj3 (therap* or intervention* or support*)).ti.
2793
- 2 Animal Assisted Therapy/ or Dogs/ or Service Animals/ 348416
- 3 1 or 2 349957
- 4 ((employee* or staff* or hospital* or worker* or professional* or clinician* or personnel)
adj3 (wellbeing or well-being or morale or mental health or wellness)).ti. 4776
- 5 exp health personnel/ or exp Allied Health Occupations/ or exp Hospitals/ 977933
- 6 4 or 5 980931
- 7 3 and 6 1861
- 8 Hospitals, Animal/ or exp Veterinary Medicine/ or Veterinary.mp. 470551
- 9 7 not 8 644
- 10 limit 9 to (english language and last 10 years) 252

Monash Health Library

PRISMA CHART



This report contains curated literature results against a unique set of criteria at a particular point in time. Users of this service are responsible for independently appraising the quality, reliability, and applicability of the evidence cited. We strongly recommend consulting the original sources and seeking further expert advice.