

Fecava policy statement on

ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY

ANIMAL ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

RESIDENT ANIMAL

PROGRAMS

Animal Assisted Therapy

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- FECAVA officially recognises that the human-animal bond is of great importance to human health in the manner that it benefits the individual but also the benefits that it brings to the community. FECAVA acknowledges that the human-animal bond has existed for thousands of years and that this relationship has major importance for veterinary medicine. Insofar as veterinary medicine serves society, veterinarians should be seen to fulfill the needs of both humans and animals.
- Animal assisted activities (AAA), animal assisted therapy (AAT) and resident animal (RA) programmes are all endorsed by human healthcare providers as cost-effective interventions for specific patient populations in various acute and rehabilitative care facilities. The human-animal bond is important to both human and animal health (see FECAVA paper on the socio-economic importance of animals and their benefit to human health). The health and welfare of both the humans and the animals involved in AAT,AAA and RA programmes must be ensured. Veterinary medicine through its scientific expertise serves human as well as animal health and therefore plays a key role in the interdisciplinary fields of AAA,AAT and RA programmes. Veterinarians, as individuals and as professionals, are uniquely qualified to provide these community services through becoming involved in these programmes. They serve animal health and welfare through provision of medical care and they serve public health as experts in zoonotic diseases.
- The scientific support of veterinarians in the evaluation and documentation of the health benefits of the human-animal bond is essential. Veterinarians are well placed to form special sub-committees to devise a technical manual for each specialist participating in either AAT, AAA or RA programmes with a view to providing a harmonized approach.

- FECAVA recommends that AAT, AAA and RA programmes should be governed by basic standards, be regularly monitored and be staffed by appropriately trained personnel.
- Veterinarians should become active participants in AAA, AAT and RA programmes once approached for assistance either by a legal representative or the Director of a health care or human service facility. Veterinarians should also initiate such programmes as cooperative projects between human and animal health care providers. As experts on the profile, health and welfare of the animals participating in such programmes, veterinarians are well placed, in cooperation with the experts in related fields, to provide answers to the fundamental questions regarding correct animal husbandry and behaviour.

Successful AAA, AAT and RA programmes are inherently interdisciplinary and present a wonderful opportunity for veterinarians, physicians, educators, nursing staff, activity directors, therapists and volunteers to work together to achieve a common goal that benefits both patients and animals.

Legally-authorised companion animals may participate in AAT, AAA or RA programmes.

The 'Five Freedoms' that underpin all animal welfare considerations must apply in all cases:

- 1. Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition
- 2. Freedom from discomfort by providing a suitable environment
- 3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- 4. Freedom from fear and distress.
- 5. Freedom to express normal behaviour