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**Purpose** In personal care homes, also called nursing homes, the value of interaction with animals (usually dogs, cats or birds) has been studied for several years. It is intuitively appealing that animals can assist with therapy (animal assisted therapy) and with activities (animal assisted activity). For older adults with cognitive and communicative limitations, animals can provide a comfortable focus for interacting with family and staff. While these older adults experience benefits, there are also concerns about allergies, infections, bites and scratches<sup>1</sup>. Another option is the use of robotic animals that provide similar benefits but without some of the drawbacks. Banks, Willoughby and Banks (2008)<sup>2</sup> studied nursing home residents' interactions with robotic and real dogs and discovered decreased loneliness in both groups of residents and that the residents became similarly attached to the robotic and real dogs. Dr. Takanori Shibata, an engineer and inventor, created a table-top robot that resembles a baby Harp Seal. Since 2002, he and his colleague, Kazuyoshi Wada at the Tokyo Metropolitan University have tested this robotic seal (PARO) with residents in the 'Toyoura' nursing home north of Tokyo. Their findings have suggested improved mood (decreased depression as measured with the Faces Scales), decreased hormonal stress levels (as measured through urinalysis) and increased communication (as measured by an increased number of utterances)<sup>3,4</sup>. In the United States, Kidd, Taggart and Turkle (2006)<sup>5</sup> reported positive and negative aspects of using PARO with residents in nursing homes. In this poster, we report on a preliminary study conducted with residents (n=3) with dementia in a personal care home setting in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. **Method** The residents were videotaped while interacting with PARO for 30 minutes per day, 3 days a week for 2 weeks. The Faces Scale was used before and after every interaction and a self-rated depression item was also used. The videotapes are intended to be used to measure utterances, following the work of Shibata and Wada. In addition, open-ended interviews were conducted with family members, asking about their perspectives on their family member's interaction with a robotic seal. **Results & Discussion** Use of the Faces Scale was not productive with residents often having difficulty concentrating on the task of selecting a 'face' that represented their mood. The number of utterances appear to increase but final tabulations are in process. Comments from families indicate strong testimonials on how beneficial PARO was to their family member's mood, engagement and comfort. One daughter described her mother's reaction and ongoing engagement with PARO as "[my mother] just melted. She just relaxed. She just smiled. It was almost, looking at her, she was happy. She was happy".

### References

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