Who asks people with dementia in long-term care what they prefer in artificial pet therapy?
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Purpose As people with dementia living in long-term care facilities (LTC) often display signs of anxiety and agitation, in the last years the use of robotic animals (Pu, Moyle, Jones & Todorovic, 2019) has become more common. Since 2002, studies are published where pet therapy is replaced by therapeutic robotic animals. In an early study (Libin & Cohen-Mansfield), reactions to two different stimuli (a robotic cat and a plush toy cat) were compared. Although it was concluded that there is no difference in using either a plush toy cat or a robotic cat in LTC, 'robotherapy' has been further developed. Nowadays the more expensive robotic animals (e.g., Paro, the robotic seal) are often favoured by care staff. But, has the voice of people with dementia been taken into account by care staff or designers of robotic animals? There might be a difference in preferences and values between care staff, family and people with dementia. **Method** In the first phase of the study, the actions and reactions of people with dementia while engaging with robotic cats, was observed. Setting: care unit for people with dementia within psychogeriatric LTC. A purposive sample of 8 older persons with moderate/severe dementia (5 females, 3 males, ages 65-99) In 4 days, a total of 27 observation sessions including 21 behavioral items took place in the collective living room. In a later phase of the study the actions and reactions while simultaneously introducing plush toy cats will be studied, and the personal preferences of people with dementia will be determined. **Results and Discussion** The observed persons with dementia are more talkative whilst not engaged with a robotic cat. When they have the robotic cat near them or on their lap, they are more focused on the cat than on their environment. Without a cat, they talk more to their neighbours or staff. When the respondents have a robotic cat with them, they mostly stroke, cuddle and shake the cat. They use their arms frequently, whereas they sit quite motionless without the cat. In this first phase, something interesting was observed by accidental occurrence. While observing on one particular day, real small animals were also introduced (pet therapy). The reactions to the real animals were not different than to the robotic cats. It was surprising that there was no visible preference. In literature there are few studies comparing robotherapy with either pet therapy or therapy with plush toys, and there is lack of research into effects in psychogeriatric care in general (Bemelmans, Gelderblom, Jonker & De Witte, 2012). Reviews report shortcomings of collected evidence (Pu, Moyle, Jones & Todorovic, 2019; Bemelmans, Gelderblom, Jonker & De Witte, 2012). In research about Paro interventions, also an inactivated Paro was used (Moyle et al., 2015) and qualitative examination of family or care staff perceptions was included (Moyle, Bramble, Jones & Murfield, 2017; Moyle, Bramble, Jones & Murfield, 2018). Further research, including the voice of persons with dementia on their preferences, is obligate, as planned in this case study.

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