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HISTORICAL PRECONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CANISTHERAPY AS A METHOD OF SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The article examines the historical prerequisites for the development of canistherapy as a method of socio-psychological support. The relevance of the study is determined by the growing interest in the use of animal-assisted therapy in social work, psychology, and rehabilitation practice, as well as the need for scientific justification of its effectiveness. The purpose of the article is to analyze and systematize the historical foundations of canistherapy as a method of socio-psychological support.

The study analyzed historical sources, scientific publications, and modern approaches to the use of canistherapy in socio-psychological practice. It was established that human-dog interaction has a long history, which gradually contributed to the perception of dogs as companions capable of positively influencing a person's psycho-emotional state. It was determined that an important stage in the development of ideas about using animals for therapeutic purposes was the spread of humanistic approaches in medicine and psychiatry at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. Significant contributions to the scientific understanding of the therapeutic potential of human-animal interaction were made by the research of B. Levinson, which initiated the development of animal-assisted therapy as a separate field of scientific and practical study.

The article also highlights the development of canistherapy in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, its dissemination in medical, educational, and social-rehabilitation institutions, as well as the activities of international organizations that promote animal-assisted therapy programs. It is emphasized that today canistherapy is considered an effective tool for psychosocial support, contributing to the reduction of anxiety and stress levels, improvement of emotional well-being, and enhancement of social adaptation.

Key words: canistherapy, animal-assisted therapy, socio-psychological support, animal therapy, social work, psycho-emotional state, rehabilitation, socio-psychological assistance.

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ІСТОРИЧНІ ПЕРЕДУМОВИ СТАНОВЛЕННЯ КАНІСТЕРАПІЇ ЯК МЕТОДУ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ ПІДТРИМКИ

У статті розглянуто історичні передумови становлення каністерапії як методу соціально-психологічної підтримки. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням інтересу до використання терапії за участю

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тварин у практиці соціальної роботи, психології та реабілітації, а також потребою у науковому обґрунтуванні її ефективності. Метою статті є проаналізувати та систематизувати історичні передумови становлення каністерапії як методу соціально-психологічної підтримки.

У процесі дослідження проаналізовано історичні джерела, наукові публікації та сучасні підходи до використання каністерапії у соціально-психологічній практиці. Встановлено, що взаємодія людини і собаки має тривалу історію, яка поступово сприяла формуванню уявлення про собаку як компаньйона, здатного позитивно впливати на психоемоційний стан людини. Визначено, що важливим етапом у розвитку ідей використання тварин у терапевтичних цілях стало поширення гуманістичних підходів у медицині та психіатрії наприкінці XVIII – на початку XIX століття. Значну роль у науковому осмисленні терапевтичного потенціалу взаємодії людини і тварини відіграли дослідження Б. Левінсона, які започаткували розвиток терапії за участю тварин як окремого напрямку наукових і практичних досліджень.

У статті також висвітлено розвиток каністерапії у другій половині XX – на початку XXI століття, її поширення у медичних, освітніх та соціально-реабілітаційних установах, а також діяльність міжнародних організацій, що сприяють розвитку програм терапії за участю тварин. Підкреслено, що каністерапія сьогодні розглядається як ефективний інструмент психосоціальної підтримки, який сприяє зниженню рівня тривожності та стресу, покращенню емоційного стану та соціальної адаптації людини.

Ключові слова: каністерапія, терапія за участю тварин, соціально-психологічна підтримка, анімалотерапія, соціальна робота, психоемоційний стан, реабілітація, соціально-психологічна допомога.

Problem statement. Canistherapy, as a method of socio-psychological support, is gaining increasing importance today in professional practice with people of different age groups and social backgrounds. Studying the historical preconditions for its development makes it possible to trace the evolution of human-dog interaction from early observations to the implementation of systematic therapeutic approaches. Analysis of the historical context helps to identify the sociocultural, scientific, and practical factors that contributed to the formation of canistherapy as an effective means of psychological and emotional support. Understanding these preconditions is important for improving modern canistherapy programs and practices and for increasing their effectiveness in socio-psychological work.

The purpose of the article. To analyze and systematize the historical preconditions for the development of canistherapy as a method of socio-psychological support.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Modern scientific studies confirm the growing use of animal-assisted therapy in the practice of social work, psychology, and rehabilitation. Canistherapy is one of the areas of animal-assisted interventions involving dogs, which has developed over thousands of years and has become a foundation for rehabilitation and therapeutic interaction. An analysis of recent publications indicates that human–animal interaction is considered an interdisciplinary method. In particular, A. Yukhasova and A. Martishova examine the term “canistherapy”,

emphasizing the differentiation between dog-assisted interventions and dog-assisted activities (Yukhasova, 2020). Yu. Krempa, B. Hutyi and others note that “canistherapy is one of the types of supportive therapy within комплекс treatment, involving the use of dogs to improve the patient’s social, emotional, or cognitive functions” (Krempa, 2024).

O. Kravchenko considers canistherapy as “a process and a system of psychological and pedagogical measures aimed at restoring and developing alternative physical or mental functions, eliminating, and fully compensating for limitations in daily functioning caused by health disorders through interaction with a dog” (Kravchenko, 2021; 2025). L. Kashuba and O. Chekan emphasize that the involvement of specially trained dogs in interaction with various groups of people for psychological work has significant potential for diversifying methods of psychological correction, which is referred to as canistherapy (Kashuba, 2023).

S. Sadrytska states that canistherapy “is one of the youngest areas in social rehabilitation” (Sadrytska, 2021). She also notes that canistherapy has passed the initial stage of development in Ukraine, in particular through the establishment of the Ukrainian Canistherapy Association, which is supported by the Kennel Union of Ukraine (Sadrytska, 2021).

Presentation of the main material. By the Middle Ages, dogs had become an important element of human everyday life, being widespread both among common people and the aristocracy. Historical sources of the fourteenth

century indicate that individuals engaged in breeding and keeping dogs noted their relatively short lifespan, considering it one of the few negative characteristics of these animals. Written records from the early seventeenth century, particularly English lexicographic sources, first documented the use of the concept of a “pet”, which was predominantly applied to dogs (Ruegg, 2024).

E. Ruegg argues that the centuries-long interaction between humans and dogs contributed to the formation in society of the perception of these animals as reliable companions capable of providing emotional support, improving a person’s psycho-emotional state, and reducing manifestations of social isolation (Ruegg, 2024).

These historically formed features of human–dog interaction led to the gradual development of scientific interest in the therapeutic potential of animals. Subsequently, this became the basis for the development of animal-assisted therapy practices, particularly canistherapy, which today is considered an effective method of socio-psychological support for various population groups.

The use of animals in supporting people with mental disorders has a long historical tradition. One of the earliest documented examples of involving domestic animals in a therapeutic environment is considered the practice initiated at the end of the eighteenth century at the York Retreat in England. In 1792, rabbits and domestic poultry were used in the Quaker York Retreat (England), and at the beginning of the nineteenth century groups of people began training dogs to help blind individuals navigate the world (Fine, 2019).

Founded in 1796, this institution became well known for implementing the so-called “moral treatment” approach, which differed significantly from the methods commonly used at that time for treating individuals with mental disorders (Ruegg, 2024).

In many medical institutions of that period, patients were subjected to harsh and humiliating procedures, including prolonged physical restraint, isolation, bloodletting (including with the use of leeches), and immersion in cold water. In contrast to such practices, the concept of moral treatment was based on principles of humanity, benevolent attitudes,

and the creation of a supportive therapeutic environment. Archival materials from the York Retreat indicate that the presence of small domestic animals on the institution’s grounds had a positive impact on patients’ emotional states. Their presence helped reduce agitation and psychological tension and contributed to the creation of a calmer atmosphere. In addition, interaction with animals was considered a way of bringing individuals closer to the natural environment, which was regarded as important in the process of restoring mental health (Ruegg, 2024).

An important stage in the scientific understanding of the therapeutic potential of human–animal interaction was the research of the American child psychotherapist Boris Levinson in the 1960s. In the course of his professional activity, he noticed the positive influence of a dog’s presence during psychotherapy sessions with children who had communication difficulties or showed signs of emotional withdrawal. B. Levinson observed that interaction with an animal facilitated the establishment of contact between the therapist and the child, reduced tension, and stimulated communicative activity. In 1964, Levinson introduced the term “pet therapy” (Fine, 2019).

In subsequent scientific works, the researcher substantiated the possibility of purposeful use of animals as an auxiliary tool in psychotherapeutic practice. He proposed considering the animal as a kind of mediator in establishing trusting relationships between the specialist and the patient. The results of these observations formed the basis for the development of a new direction in psychotherapy, which later became known as Animal-Assisted Therapy (Ernst, 2014).

The ideas of B. Levinson contributed to the intensification of scientific research in this field and the gradual implementation of animal-assisted therapy in the practice of medical, rehabilitation, and social institutions. Within this direction, separate specialized methods were formed, among which canistherapy – the use of dogs in the process of psychological support, social adaptation, and rehabilitation of various population groups–became particularly widespread (Ernst, 2014).

In 1869, Florence Nightingale began using animals in therapeutic practice. As the founder

of modern nursing, she noted that small pets help reduce anxiety in children and adults living in psychiatric institutions. In her book *Notes on Nursing*, she wrote that being with small animals helps patients recover. F. Nightingale used canistherapy as a method of treating anxiety and as a way of relaxation (Ernst, 2014).

In the early 1930s, the well-known psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud also drew attention to the possibilities of using animals in psychotherapeutic practice. During therapy sessions he involved his dog Jofi, observing its reactions as a kind of indicator of patients' emotional states. Freud assumed that the animal's behavior could reflect the level of a person's internal tension: the dog's closeness to the patient was interpreted as a sign of a calmer psycho-emotional state, while distancing could indicate an increased level of anxiety. At the same time, the presence of the dog helped create a more trusting atmosphere during psychotherapy and facilitated communication between the doctor and the patient, since for some individuals interaction with the animal became an intermediate stage in establishing direct contact with the therapist (Ernst, 2014).

The generalization of these materials allows Freud's observations to be considered as one of the early examples of understanding the role of animals in the psychotherapeutic process, which later became an important prerequisite for the development of animal-assisted therapy and, in particular, canistherapy.

Throughout the nineteenth century, ideas of humane treatment of patients with mental disorders gradually spread in the medical practice of various European countries. Along with the development of moral treatment approaches, attention to the influence of the natural environment and interaction with animals on a person's psycho-emotional state increased. In a number of medical institutions, animals began to be used as an element of the therapeutic environment, contributing to the creation of a calmer atmosphere and stimulating patients' social activity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, interest in human-animal interaction in therapeutic and rehabilitation practices gradually gained scientific justification. Researchers and practitioners began to pay attention to the

positive impact of communication with animals on emotional states, anxiety levels, and social behavior. This effect was especially noticeable in work with children, people with disabilities, and patients experiencing psychological trauma or prolonged stress.

An important stage in the development of animal-assisted therapy occurred in the mid-twentieth century, when the first scientific studies devoted to the therapeutic potential of human-animal interaction began to appear. During this period, the prerequisites emerged for distinguishing separate areas of such therapy, among which canistherapy occupied a special place—a method of psychosocial support that involves the purposeful use of dogs in the process of rehabilitation, social adaptation, and emotional support.

L. Ernst noted that loneliness, depression, and social isolation can be reduced even through a single contact with a dog, such as petting it. During such interactions, the dog becomes a source of encouragement, and a healing atmosphere is created between the patient and the animal (Ernst, 2014).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, animal-assisted therapy has actively developed and spread in various countries around the world. Scientific studies conducted in the United States and Western Europe confirmed the positive impact of human-animal interaction on emotional well-being, anxiety levels, social activity, and overall quality of life. During this period, animal-assisted therapy gradually became integrated into the activities of medical, rehabilitation, educational, and social institutions.

Particularly significant development occurred in the use of dogs in therapeutic programs, which is due to their behavioral characteristics, high level of social adaptability, and ability to interact with humans. These qualities contributed to the formation of a separate direction within animal-assisted therapy – canistherapy – which involves the purposeful use of specially trained dogs in psychological support, social adaptation, and rehabilitation of various population groups.

The therapy animal visiting program “Pet Partners” has been operating since 1977 and supports thousands of volunteer therapy animal teams that have made millions of meaningful

visits around the world, helping to improve the physical, social, and emotional well-being of both people and animals. Within the zootherapy program, training is conducted through webinars such as “Maybe I Want to Do This!”, “I Started My Journey and Have Questions”, and “We Have Completed the Other Steps and Are Ready for Evaluation” (Pet Partners).

The international headquarters of Pet Partners is located in Bellevue, Washington, and most of its staff work remotely from other locations across the United States (Pet Partners). Thousands of therapy animal teams are registered within the program, making millions of visits annually to various institutions and communities, including patients with intellectual disabilities, older adults living with Alzheimer’s disease, students, veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, people who have experienced crises, and individuals approaching the end of life (Pet Partners).

In many countries around the world, specialized organizations and programs have been established to develop animal-assisted therapy. In particular, in the United States and European countries professional associations have been created that train therapy dogs, develop methodological recommendations, and implement relevant programs in social work, medicine, and education. Today, canistherapy is used in work with children with special educational needs, people with disabilities, individuals who have experienced psychological trauma, as well as in psychosocial support programs for veterans and people in difficult life circumstances.

The Pet Partners program has also conducted empirical research on therapy animal interventions, summarized in the book “*Empirical Support for Therapy Animal Interventions: White Paper*”. The book includes sections such as “Therapy Animals in Medical Settings”, “Therapy Animals and Physical Health”, and others. The main outcomes of patient interaction with dogs include reduced pain, improved and faster recovery, decreased anxiety and stress, and reduced fear and worry. Pet Partners teams

undergo specialized training to provide effective interventions in medical institutions worldwide (Pet Partners).

Thus, the historical development of animal-assisted therapy demonstrates the gradual recognition of its therapeutic potential and the formation of canistherapy as a separate field of socio-psychological assistance, which is now widely used in various areas of professional activity by social workers, psychologists, social educators, and rehabilitation specialists.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Thus, the development of canistherapy as a method of socio-psychological support is the result of a long historical evolution of the relationship between humans and dogs. In Ukraine, this field is gradually developing, which determines the need for its further scientific understanding and methodological support.

The current stage of canistherapy development is characterized by its active spread across various areas of professional activity, particularly in medicine, social work, psychology, education, and rehabilitation. The results of scientific research and practical experience indicate the positive impact of human–dog interaction on reducing anxiety and stress levels, improving emotional well-being, stimulating social activity, and enhancing people’s quality of life.

Prospects for further research should be associated with expanding scientific knowledge about the possibilities of applying canistherapy in work with different population groups. In particular, studying its effectiveness in psychosocial support programs for children and youth, people with disabilities, veterans, and individuals who have experienced difficult life circumstances or traumatic events remains relevant. An important direction is also the development of practical methods for using canistherapy in social work, the training of specialists for the implementation of relevant programs, as well as research into the possibilities of integrating this method into interdisciplinary approaches to rehabilitation and psychosocial support.

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