

Animals, Horseback Riding, and Implications for Rehabilitation Therapy
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Historically, animals have played an important role in peoples' lives. Domestication of animals began over 12,000 years ago and continues today (Jorgenson, 1997). Approximately 53 million (56%) households in the United States (U.S.) in 1994 had a companion animal and more than half of these 53 million households had more than one animal (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Beck & Myers, 1996; Sable, 1995). U.S. households own more dogs than any other pet, but the number of dogs and cats has been found to be declining, with ownership of birds, small animals, reptiles, and freshwater fish increasing. Two percent of U.S. households owns an average of 2.54 horses. People living in households with pets tend to be younger than the general population and people living in households with children more commonly have dogs, cats, or other small mammals (Beck & Myers, 1996). Gammonley and Yates (1991) reported that most Americans will own a pet during their lifetimes and that animals serve not only as pets but also as working companions for persons with disabilities.

The earliest recorded use of animals in health care was by Florence Nightingale in 1860. Nightingale (1969) observed that "a small pet is often an excellent companion for the sick, for long chronic cases especially" (p. 103). She suggested that a person confined for years to the same room might enjoy and find pleasure in the presence of a caged bird. York Retreat in England, in the late 18th century, was the setting for the first recorded therapeutic use of animals. York Retreat incorporated small animals in its treatment of individuals with psychiatric problems. This intervention occurred in an attempt to decrease the use of drugs and restraints (Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987; Willis, 1997). The first extensive use of animals in a therapeutic setting in the United States occurred from 1944 to 1945 in Pawling, New York. Patients, recovering at the Army Air Corps Convalescent