

Peer Review

Review of: "Effect of Animal-Assisted Activities on Symptoms and Emotions of Children with Neoplastic Disease: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis"

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This systematic review with meta-analysis addresses a clinically relevant and well-defined question regarding the effectiveness of animal-assisted activities (AAAs) in pediatric oncology; the protocol registration (PROSPERO), adherence to PRISMA, use of RoB 2, random-effects modeling, and GRADE assessment represent clear methodological strengths. However, the evidence base is extremely limited, with only three small U.S.-based RCTs (N=151 children), substantial heterogeneity for some outcomes ($I^2 > 80\%$ for quality of life and caregiver anxiety), and largely non-significant pooled effects (e.g., SMD -0.07 for child anxiety), resulting in low to very low certainty of evidence. While the authors appropriately adopt a cautious interpretation, the discussion could further emphasize the imprecision of estimates (e.g., very large NNT), the lack of subgroup analyses, limited cultural generalizability, and variability in intervention structure and outcome measurement. Overall, the review is methodologically sound and transparent but ultimately highlights the insufficiency of high-quality evidence rather than demonstrating clear clinical effectiveness, underscoring the need for larger, multicenter, rigorously designed RCTs before AAAs can be confidently recommended in pediatric oncology practice.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.