

# Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Carlyle, Donna and Watson, Katie (2021) "Dog" is "God" Spelled Backward: "Poppy Jingles," the Staff Well-being Spaniel. Health and Social Care Chaplaincy, 9 (2). pp. 315-324. ISSN 2051-5553

Published by: Equinox Publishing

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1558/hsc.41120> <<https://doi.org/10.1558/hsc.41120>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:  
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/43788/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)

# **‘Dog’ is ‘God’ spelled backwards: Poppy the spaniel enhancing staff wellbeing.**

Donna Carlyle<sup>1</sup>  
Northumbria University, UK  
donna.carlyle@northumbria.ac.

Katie Watson<sup>2</sup>  
Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UK  
katie.watson21@nhs.net

## **Abstract**

This brief report describes the unique and innovative work of a hospital chaplaincy staff welfare dog, and ‘Good Samaritan’, ‘Poppy Jingles’. As the importance of enabling and facilitating wellbeing through the prevention of stress and burnout for NHS staff have been highlighted in current policy, such an initiative and staff intervention is both timely and significant. The relevance of inter-species wellbeing is detailed through what can be considered as Poppy’s ‘nonhuman charisma’. This includes eliciting aspects of wellbeing, which can be thought to correspond to eudaimonic states of human flourishing- living a good life through the service of others. Staff reporting on their improved wellbeing through attendance at Poppy’s ‘Pat and Chat’ sessions with her guardian and Chaplain is captured through the visual medium of comic narrative with thought and speech bubbles.

## **Key words**

Caring professions, hospital staff welfare, Good Samaritan, dog-human relationships, wellbeing, eudaimonic flourishing, spirituality, creative media and methods.

## **Introduction**

The use of animal assisted therapy has been well researched and established within many settings and organisations such as schools, colleges, universities, prisons, courts, and nursing homes, (Jalongo, et al, (2004); Charles and Wolkowitz, (2017); Matuszek, (2010);

---

<sup>1</sup> Donna Carlyle is a lecturer in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. **ORCID ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4600-3349>

<sup>2</sup> Reverend Captain Katie Watson, Hospital Chaplain, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UK

Deaton, (2005); Dellinger, (2009). In particular, dogs have also been crucial in the service of customs at airports, (Hunter, 2002), police forces, (Hart et al, 2000), medical detection, (Pesterfield, 2015), and mine detection (Kirk, 2014) using their olfactory prowess to great effect. As 'sniffer dogs' they wheedle out drugs, follow scent tracks, detect some cancers, low blood sugar levels in diabetics and can sense the onset of a seizure for those with epilepsy. It is understood that our canine companions are indeed mutually entangled and entwined with humans, both emotionally and physically. The boundaries of these multiple affordances are being further expanded by a rather unique and novel pastoral carer and spiritual supporter in the form of a Springer Spaniel named 'Poppy Jingles'. This charismatic hospital hound has recently been registered as part of the hospital chaplaincy staff team, with her very own identity badge to boot. Such is Poppy Jingles 'non-human charisma' (Lorimer, 2007) that she reaches the parts her carer/guardian and hospital Chaplain Captain Katie Watson cannot reach. As a designated dog, for staff support and wellbeing, Poppy Jingles is playing an important role in supporting the incredible NHS troops doing essential, demanding and brave work, particularly in light of the recent coronavirus pandemic. As such, the work of Poppy Jingles has gained increased attention from social media and external partners of the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

As Florence Nightingale, the iconic 'lady with the lamp' attested to the healing benefits of animal companion's many years ago, she clearly understood this was helpful to patients. In her 'nursing notes' she said a pet animal 'is often an excellent companion for the sick, for chronic cases especially' (Nightingale, 2005: 63). Indeed, not only invaluable to patients through many Animal Assistance Therapy (AAT) schemes, (Kruger, Trachtenberg, and Serpell, 2004) but also to the staff caring for them. In this paper, we highlight some of these fundamental benefits to staff support and well-being.

### **Caring for the Carers**

This brief report therefore provides an insight into the contribution Poppy Jingles is making to support staff welfare and morale to enable ongoing well-being often during traumatic and challenging times. Wellbeing is a key component of human flourishing and having a sense of 'eudaimonia' (living a good life) is considered vital to achieving a strong sense of wellbeing. In the context of The Department of Health and their Health and Wellbeing Strategy, for NHS staff (2011), it has been identified that with healthy staff comes better

care for patients. As suggested by Maslach and Jackson, (1986), the emotional toll of caring professions can be challenging and overwhelming, resulting in stress and anxiety, culminating in it being conceptualized as 'burnout'. The association of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (negative and dehumanized attitudes towards patients) and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment in their work has been reported.

Clearly, such negative affective experience can greatly influence both caring professionals and patients, indicating a need to ensure both are psychologically supported. Considering eudaimonia and human flourishing – a flourishing of the soul - as the opposite to burnout is a helpful way to re-configure quality of care and staff wellbeing, (Epstein, 2017). Aristotle, (2011) considered eudaimonia to be the moral and virtuous pinnacle of human achievement as it enables us to work more effectively and effortlessly for the good of others. Its juxtaposition in philosophical terms, within health care settings is therefore a good fit in seeking to scaffold eudaimonia and develop healthy relationships with staff and their work that integrates satisfaction in their work.

### **A Communion of Compassion**

The curiosity and playfulness of Poppy Jingles is visibly very engaging. In a 're-wilding' of our hearts, that is, connecting us back with nature and the beauty of all forms of life and its vicissitudes is perhaps her hidden endearment. Through her spontaneous acts of giving (often a paw or ball) and active listening skills, she offers a distraction, diversion and moment of solace. Poppy Jingles gives herself freely to human service and that very characteristic in itself mirrors and parallels with the very purpose and vocation of being a nurse, doctor and also a Hospital Chaplain. This mutual communion is one that binds and ties us together. As a caring companion, she bestows God's grace and brings a sense of kinship and ministry to the Chaplaincy team and staff teams alike. Poppy is distinctive in that she expands on the notion of a therapy dog. Her role is not dissimilar to the concept of Chaplains where the ancient belief is that the Chaplain joins those on their journeys, by being out there in the world, making themselves vulnerable to the needs of others. Scripturally, Poppy is also perhaps the Good Samaritan that the gospel writer Luke refers to in chapter 10:33, "But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he

saw him, he took pity on him”. She shows no difference to those of different status, religion or gender, she tends to their soul wounds in her own unique way.

As Haraway, (2007: 4) purports in her vivid account of what constitutes our human-canine relationship ‘*what do we touch when we touch this dog?*’ is a worthy question. However, maybe we should be asking what Poppy Jingles touches within us? She is far from just being cute and cuddly and her affective presence to transform staff morale has been quite humbling and extraordinary to witness. She literally lights up a room and immediately changes the atmosphere. Her fun and frolics seem to permeate even the most tense and stressful of spaces. To use a metaphor, she is like a pin popping an overinflated balloon – letting all the stress just ooze out and dissipate!

### **Clinical Intervention Vignette 1**

#### **Doctor “Jamie”**



*“I love Poppy coming to see the staff. Immediately she changes the mood and lightens it with her presence. Sometimes her big eyes seem to look into your very soul with a ‘knowing’ gaze like she gets what a tough shift you’ve had. She injects a huge dose of fun. She might be a dog but she has developed a ‘ministry’ like the Chaplain, administering a diversion, a place to chat about other things. Waiting for her visit is a highlight and we all come together, even if only for a few minutes, so I think that is what she does, brings us together”.*

## Clinical Intervention Vignette 2 Staff Nurse "Sally"



*"I think seeing Poppy all bouncy and happy gives us fresh energy. Maybe it's that she reminds us of ourselves, giving herself to the caring of others like we do for our patients. It's hard to say, but she brings something that helps you go beyond the stress and intensity of work, just patting her and stroking her is soothing and calming.....yes...it's that touching...it just feels good and warm. She keeps me in touch with my humility and compassion".*

### **Finding a narrative through making a comic**

As a Hospital Chaplain, a fundamental aspect of the role is compassion and communication. In valuing people and helping them on the road to eudaimonic wellbeing in tandem with Poppy Jingles a nurturing of what Ueland, (1993) calls 'creative fountain', can lift spirits and moral and make all the difference. Ueland (1993:1) states:

When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life...that is why when someone has listened to you, you go home rested and lighthearted...it is because by listening I have started their creative fountain.

To gain insight into the effectiveness of Poppy Jingles interactions with staff a narrative was encouraged through the creative medium of comic panels- using photo images and thought/speech bubbles. This helped elicit the perceived benefits of having Poppy Jingles as a source of staff welfare support. The use of comics encourages a more

playful and relaxed approach to evaluation, and engages participation as well as aiding assessment and reflexivity of the overall evaluation process. Visual media is a powerful medium and can be a data collection tool to communicate results to various audiences, (Darnhofer, 2018).

**A number of qualitative comments were noted from staff. These contained three themes:-**

**Theme (1) Expression of Feelings**

*"Healing". "Happy". "Sometimes all you need is a cuddle off Pops 😊".*

*"Instantly more happier and joyful." "Poppy never fails to make me smile."*

*"Crazy & chaotic but so much joy!" "Great idea to boost staff morale". "Feelings of calm/relaxed environment". "Feeling more positive". "Felt instantly uplifted, a mood booster!" "Peaceful".*

**Theme (2) Improved Communication**

*"Lifts the spirits and mood in the office." "Poppy brings the team together".*

*"Gets us all talking". "She (Poppy) brings people together". "Conversation starter".*

*"Breaks down barriers". "Friendship". "Ice-breaker to talk".*

**Theme (3) Anxiety Distraction**

*"Helps take your mind off the stressful nature of working in a hospital."*

*"She (Poppy) takes my mind off any stress that has built up". "Helps to ease anxiety".*

*"Very calming stroking a dog". "De-compression time". "De-stressing". "Forgot work problems". "Positive energy". "Makes me think of life outside work". "Seeing Poppy makes you forget your worries". "Poppy can turn a bad day into a good day". "Poppy brings me to the present-mindfulness".*

### **An expanding vocation**

In addition to the role Poppy currently fulfils she has recently been extending her skills and responding to staff requests to take her for a walk outside of the hospital to the nearby park '*Mooch with the Pooch*'. This further endorses the wider benefits of considering outdoor activity off site as a valuable aspect of enhancing wellbeing. Our connection to nature and the outdoors plays an important function in enhancing well-being and research with children has highlighted the need to prevent 'nature-deficit disorder', (Kuo, 2013) and equally the same could be applied to adults, particularly when they work in areas of high technological stimulation and sometimes lack of natural light on high dependency, intensive care units. The idea of 'biophilia', a natural affinity with nature, has been highlighted (Wilson, 1984). This has also been suggested as supporting human thriving through access to nature and green environments. Kuo (2013) states that even brief exposure to outdoor green environments and nature can boost an individual's immunity and concentration. Poppy's facilitation of this activity is therefore substantial in terms of contribution to staff wellbeing and performance.

Poppy has also been utilised in the Chapel of Rest, aiding and supporting a child to say goodbye to a family member. Poppy's presence alongside the child enabled an intimate and moving encounter to take place, something that is often overlooked in children's processing of grief and loss, with death being something of a taboo subject. Poppy's bodily comfort and presence is therefore a phenomenon that justifies further research in this ground-breaking area.

### **Discussion**

Further research is clearly warranted to determine subjective measures of well-being of participants who attended the 'Pat and Chat' sessions. In addition, Poppy's visits to offices, wards and clinics where she interacts with all hospital staff should be explored in further detail to understand the precise nature and mechanisms of her positive affect. Clearly, as Philosopher and animal trainer Haraway asserts, 'dogs become good figures to think with – in all sorts of circumstances' (Haraway, 2000:14). Future research will strengthen the evidence-base further of the important significance of human-dog interactions and inter-species wellbeing and mutual flourishing together.



## References

- Aristotle (2011) *Nicomachean ethics* (R. C. Bartlett and S. D. Collins, Trans.), Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Charles, N and Wolkowitz, C. (2018) Bringing dogs onto campus: Inclusions and exclusions of animal bodies in organizations. *Gender Work Organization*, 2018, 1-19.
- Darnhofer, I. (2018) Using Comic-Style Posters for Engaging Participants and for promoting Researcher Reflexivity, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17( 1), 1-12.
- Deaton, C. (2005) Humanizing Prisons with Animals: A Closer Look at “Cell Dogs” and Horse Programs in Correctional Institutions, *Journal of Correctional Education*, 56(1), 46-62.
- Dellinger, M. (2009) Using dogs for emotional support of testifying victims of crime, *Animal Law*, 15(2), 171-192.
- Department of Health, UK (2011) Health Staff, Better Care for Patients. Available at: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/publications> (Accessed 28th March 2020).
- Epstein, R. M. (2017) What’s the Opposite of Burnout? *Journal of General International Medicine*, 32(7), 723-724.
- Haraway, D. J. (2000) In R. Markussen, F. Olesen and N. Lykee, *Cyborgs, Coyotes and Dogs*, Kivinder, Kon, Forskning, 2, 2000, 6-10. Available at: <http://tidsskrift.dk/KKF/article/download/28361/24959> (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020).
- Haraway, D. J. (2007) *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hart, L. A., Zasloff, R. L., Bryson, S. and Christenson, S. L. (2000) The Role of Police Dogs as Companion and Working Partners, *Psychological Reports*, 86(1), 190-202.
- Hunter, D. (2002) Common scents: Establishing presumption of reliability for Detector Dog Teams Used in Airports in Light of the Current Terrorist Threat, *University of Dayton Law Review*, 28(1), 89-110
- Jalongo, M. R., Astorino, T. and Bomboy, N. (2004) Canine Visitors: The Influence of Therapy Dogs on Young Children’s Learning and Well-Being in Classrooms and Hospitals, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(1), 9-16.
- Kirk, R. G. W. (2014) In Dogs We Trust? Intersubjectivity, Response-Able Relations and the Making of Mine Detector Dogs. *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 50(1), 1-36.

- Kuo, F. E. (2013) Nature-deficit disorder: evidence, dosage and treatment. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 5(2), 172-186.
- Kruger, K., Trachtenberg, S., and Serpell, J. (2004) Can animals help humans heal? Animal-assisted interventions in adolescent mental health, Philadelphia, PA: Centre for the Interaction of Animals and Society, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Available at: [https://research.vet.upenn.edu/Portals/36/media/CIAS\\_AAI\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://research.vet.upenn.edu/Portals/36/media/CIAS_AAI_white_paper.pdf) (Accessed: 17 April 2020)
- Lorimer, J. (2007) Nonhuman Charisma, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25, 911-932.
- Luke 10: 33 Holy Bible. King James Version. Available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/kjv/luke> (Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020).
- Maslach, C. and Jackson, S. E. (1986) *Maslach Burnout Inventory manual* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Matuszek, S. (2010) Animal-Facilitated Therapy in Various Patient Populations: Systematic Literature Review, *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 24(4), 187-203.
- Nightingale, F. (2005) *Notes on Nursing*. London: Harrison & Sons.
- Pesterfield, C. (2015) "A dog is for life, not just for hypos: medical alert assistance dogs for young people", *Podiatry Review*, 72(1), 14- 18.
- Ueland, B. (1993) Tell me more: On the fine art of listening. Web pages/booklet. Available at: [http://physics.uwyo.edu/~ddale/research/REU/2016/Tell Me More.pdf](http://physics.uwyo.edu/~ddale/research/REU/2016/Tell_Me_More.pdf) (Accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020).
- Wislon, E. O. (1984). *Biophilia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.