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WEALTH OF HEALTH

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Beloved pets offer owners a wealth of health benefits

By Ira Zunin

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Apr 28, 2012

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COURTESY ALOHA ANIMAL HOSPITAL
Jernel Miyamoto and Dr. Douglas Chang check out Beara at Aloha Animal Hospital Associates.

When I was beginning to establish my medical practice, a woman walked into the clinic with a service dog.

She was obviously not blind. We sat down.

“Do you have a seizure disorder?” I asked.

“No,” she said as she held the dog close and stroked its head. “The dog was prescribed for my social anxiety.”

Pets provide healthful opportunities not only for outdoor activities and exercise; they also help people overcome feelings of loneliness and social isolation, according to the National Institute of Health, Centers for Disease Control. Pets are particularly important to seniors or those who are physically unable to get outside. They give people something to care for and even to live for.

Research has shown that people with pets have measurably better health and lower health-related costs. Pets help reduce blood pressure as well as cholesterol and triglyceride levels, according to the CDC. This translates into lower pharmacy

costs, less frequent hospitalizations and fewer expensive procedures. A research team at the University of Melbourne found that pet owners made fewer doctor visits than non-owners. The team determined that the presence of pets saves the Australian government between \$790 million and \$1.5 billion annually.

Hawaii is filled with pet lovers, but not everyone who owns a pet appreciates the potential beneficial impact to one’s health, according to Dr. Douglas Chang, president of the Aloha Animal Hospital Associates on Oahu. He has observed that his (human) clients seem to have better health than the general population.

With the economy still on unsure footing, Chang said that “many veterinarians across the nation have seen a decline in regular office visits due to the perceived expense, but essentially, an investment in your pet’s health is really an investment in your own health.” He argues that pet owners recover more quickly from illness, save money on their own doctor bills and have fewer sick days at work.

Our own dog, Ellie, is a midsize chocolate labradoodle. She is uncanny at reading and matching the mood of those around

her. If you are up, she is ready to play. If you are quiet and melancholy, she makes contact, settles in and just hangs. Spending time with a pet is a great antidote to the part of us that can go unnourished when spending hour after hour at the computer or cruising the iPad or smartphone. Facebook may be a great way to stay in touch, but it can never compare to the touch of a good pet.

"It is not so much a matter of 'we need pets' or 'pets need us.' It is just that we are better together," Chang said. "Pets provide a place for us to express our deep nature to nurture. When we are outwardly focused on nurturing the pet's health and well-being, we create an inner peace for ourselves that nourishes our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual qualities."

For more information on health and pets, visit www.alohaanimal.com.

Ira Zunin, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., is medical director of Manakai o Malama Integrative Healthcare Group and Rehabilitation Center and CEO of Global Advisory Services Inc. Please submit your questions to info@manakaiomalama.com.

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SUBMIT COMMENT

manakuke wrote:

The basis of good health; caring for others

on April 28,2012 | 04:09AM

 REPLY

kiragirl wrote:

Pets are what he says and much much more! Yes, my life would be missing something without my pet (sweetheart). Have a nice weekend everyone.