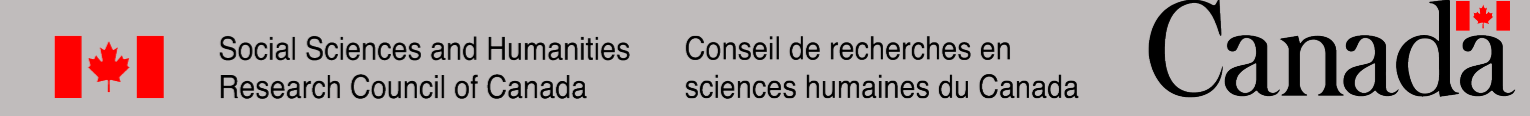


Introducing animatronic (“robotic”) pets into facility-based continuing care programming: Practical implications for delivering care to residents living with dementia

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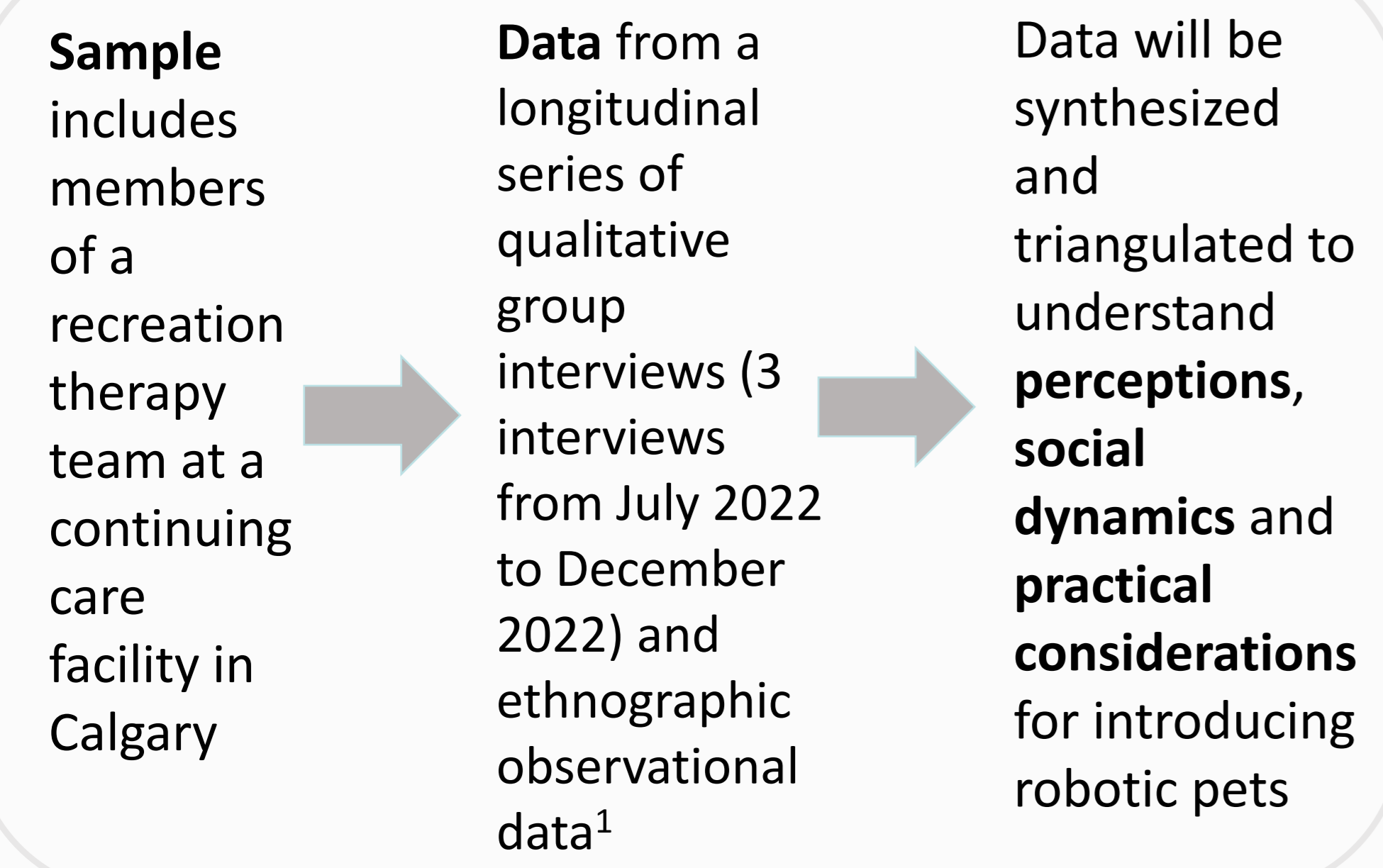
BACKGROUND

- In 2018, Ageless Innovation LLC introduced **Joy for All**® robotic cats and dogs for individuals with cognitive impairment
- Robotic pets are now often found in long-term care settings
- To date, researchers have focused on measuring therapeutic impacts of robotic pets for residents with dementia
- Little research focuses on the practical considerations to guide their introduction to residents

OBJECTIVE

To understand the practical implications of introducing a new robotic pet program for residents with mild-to-moderate dementia living in a continuing care setting.

METHODS



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

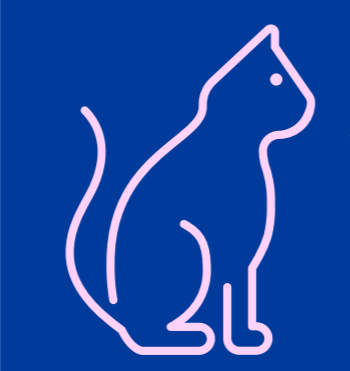
HELPFUL TIPS



Intake assessments are helpful for establishing a history of the resident which will inform best practices for therapeutic interventions as this may identify past trauma related to animals.



3 out of 4 team members recommend cats. The cats come across as more realistic in size and posture and are often preferred among residents. Dog-people also tend to enjoy the cats.



Successful techniques for introducing the pets include giving the resident a task (“Can you watch my pet?”) or letting the resident initiate an interaction out of interest or curiosity.



Placing the robotic dog on the resident’s walker to take it for a walk may encourage the resident to move around which also may help facilitate socialization with other residents.



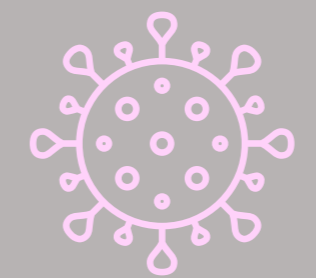
It is useful to become familiar with the robotic pet before going into an interaction by reading the instruction manual and testing them out independently.

CHALLENGES

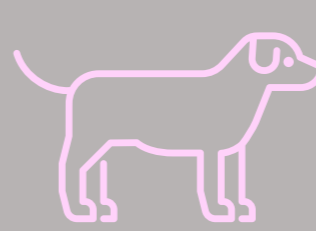
Some residents may make choices that put their safety at risk, such as holding the robotic pet rather than a walker. Some residents may want to hold the pet during exercise, inhibiting physical activity.



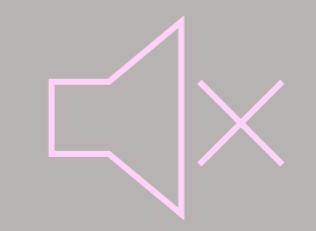
Robotic pets that stay with residents during isolation (e.g., due to COVID-19) will need to be thoroughly sanitized. A cleaning protocol should be in place.



The robotic dogs require more facilitation by recreation therapists or family members, as they must be creative in answering why the dog is not playing/running around.



Introducing robotic pets in a stimulating environment may cause adverse reactions. The pet can be switched to ‘mute’ which may mitigate this but can also enhance the resident’s anxiety around the pet’s well-being.

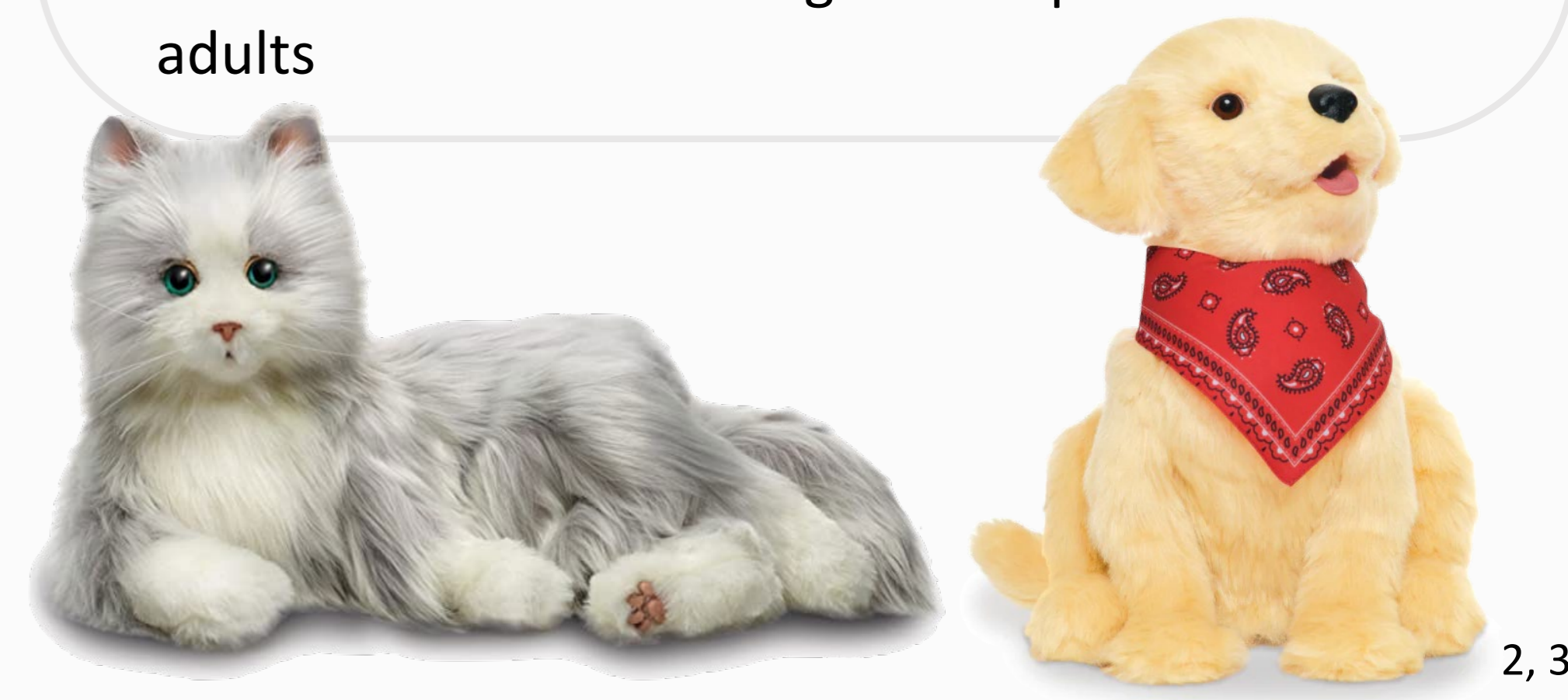


Residents who see robotic pets that look like their past real pet may become attached. This may cause challenges if others try to interact with the pet.



NEXT STEPS

- Further analysis will be conducted to develop practical considerations when working with robotic pets and residents with dementia
- Evidence-informed practices will be made available for practitioners to reference, which may enhance the efficacy of introducing robotic pets within facility-based care settings.
- In addition to working with a recreation team, a scoping review of published literature on this topic is underway to explore the practical and relational dimensions of introducing robotic pets to older adults



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