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## Dogs on the front line of care: Timely information for family physicians

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Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in the relationship between dogs and human health with a concurrent emergence of new and exciting 'medical' roles for these animals. Not only studies show that owning a pet dog can have prophylactic and therapeutic value, but that incorporating these animals into clinical practice, can have a number of benefits for different types of patients. Dogs can also fill the role of assistants for people with disabilities, bringing important physical, psychological and social positive effects for their handlers, and even be trained to alert to seizures in epileptic patients and to changes in blood sugar levels in diabetics. In light of this, a significant "push" is currently being made by a number of researchers to integrate dogs into mainstream healthcare, notably through family medicine. Data, however, suggest that family physicians do not explicitly enquire their patients about dog ownership and feel uncomfortable to discuss the benefits of acquiring assistance or alert dog, and recommend dog-assisted interventions. In this communication, a timely and comprehensive update on the scientifically stronger evidence supporting the positive effects of dogs for human health will be provided. With it, one aims at calling for the attention of family care practitioners on the clinical potential of pet dogs, namely as motivators for adherence to treatment plans, and on the importance of ensuring their patients knowledge about the possibility of engaging in dog-assisted interventions and/or acquiring an assistance or alert dog.

### Biography

Mariely Lima completed her degree in Speech Therapy and PhD in Biomedical Sciences. She is an invited Professor at two Universities in Portugal, where she lectures Post-Graduate and Master's courses and supervises academic research. She is a founding member of ANIMAS, a Portuguese association, accredited by the Assistance Dogs International, which implements dog-assisted interventions and educates assistance dogs. She has been responsible for a number of dog-assisted activities and therapy programs for individuals with different diagnoses. She has attended different conferences as an invited speaker and published a number of scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals with impact factor.

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