



# PUGET SOUND QUARTERLY

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## ZOONOSES

### Contact With Animals Poses Health Threat to Humans

Angela Hall RN MSN OCN  
Co-Editor  
Virginia Mason Medical Center

Americans have a love affair with their pets. There are more than 110 million pet dogs and cats in the United States (Tan, 1997). Pets have satisfied human needs for centuries. Searles (1960) states that "petting an animal's fur gives the individual an outlet for his ancient primate grooming urges". In our modern society pets play an important role in helping maintain our emotional stability. Pet therapy has demonstrated through research to decrease blood pressure, improve feelings of well-being, and improve muscular development (Park, 1999). Pets can become substitutes for human companionship (Frank, 1984). Animals do not judge us. They accept us and offer us comfort. They demand our attention. They bring out our nurturing side by providing us with a sense of purpose in caring for them (Jessee, 1982). Animals are not only family pets, living in an estimated 70% of American households, but they are also used in pet therapy, they pro-

vide companionship for residents of nursing homes, and are valuable service dogs for the disabled. Animals are increasingly being permitted into the acute care setting to keep the bond between pet and owner. According to Jessee (1982) bringing animals into rehabilitation settings can be beneficial, and meet the psychosocial needs of

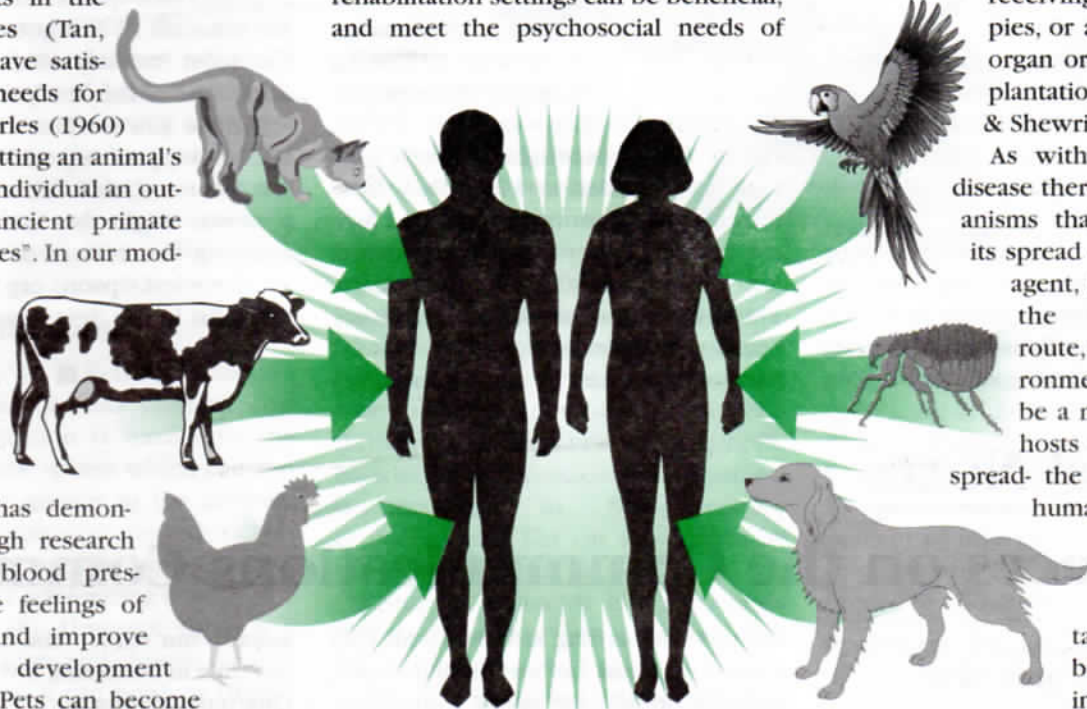
transmitted through various methods of spread. Populations who are at risk for developing animal infection include children, the elderly, individuals infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, have developed acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), are receiving cancer therapies, or are recipients of organ or stem cell transplantations (Brodie, Biley & Shewring, 2002).

As with any infectious disease there are four mechanisms that contribute to its spread (a) the infective agent, (b) the host, (c) the transmission route, and (d) the environment. There must be a minimum of two hosts for zoonoses to spread—the animal and the human. The five main routes of infection include:

(a) direct contact through bites, scratches, infected fur, excreta, and skin; (b) droplet contact which is aerosolized particles over short distance; (c) airborne spread which is aerosolized particles over long distance; (d) vector-borne diseases through mosquitoes, ticks, flies, and fleas; and (e) transmission through food and water (Guay, 2001). The actual occurrence rate of transmission is controlled by the type

patients. The most common pets in nursing homes include birds, cats and dogs (Guay, 2001).

However, there is a risk of transmission of animal infections to humans. Zoonoses are animal diseases that can be transmitted to humans and are categorized by the host animal (Guay, 2001). Over 200 infectious diseases can be



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