Today’s piece was prepared by Viviane Leuche, MD, based on a New York Times story Easing the Way in Therapy with the Aid of an Animal <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/health/15brody-animals.html>

In the New York Times article, the journalist discusses the benefits of animal-assisted therapy as a service for children with emotional and social problems. Animal-assisted therapy was popularized in the 1980s and has since been used widely for different therapeutic goals, including alleviation of anxiety, boredom and loneliness, particularly for children and adults with neurodevelopmental and behavioral differences.

While the journalist describes a 2007 practice review and a 2002 published study in children with autism, the article mostly gives anecdotal reports of positive patient encounters and sense of wellness rather than objective data on the efficacy of animal-assisted therapy, including the work of Dr. Aubrey Fine, a psychotherapist who has had success in using animal-assisted therapy for treating children with selective mutism. The article mentions safety considerations regarding child or the animal due to either lack of training of the animal or some medical conditions in children.

Sources of information on animal therapies, and regional resources, can be found online:

**RESOURCES ON ANIMALS TO SUPPORT THERAPY:**  
Dog therapies <https://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds/Resources.html#section4_textarea87_heading> *Dr. Zinner’s Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics website (link to Resources)*  
  
And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!