

# Healthy Human, Healthy Dog, Healthy Nursing Student Volunteer

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Patients living with diabetes benefit from regular physical activity and health teaching regarding disease management (Fløde et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2019; Whitehead et al., 2017). In order to achieve physical activity requirements and better self-management, social support and proper education by healthcare professionals is needed. Unfortunately, many healthcare professionals are unprepared to promote a healthy lifestyle (Wills & Kelly, 2017). In a recent study, almost 80% of undergraduate nursing students did not meet the recommended weekly physical activity guidelines (Fitzgerald & Boland, 2018). In addition, many licensed nurses also report inactivity (Kimeet al., 2020). In turn, health advice provided to patients may not be perceived favorably if a nurse does not meet the health expectations themselves (Wills & Kelly, 2017). Programs engaging college students in physical activity could impact future patient health outcomes (Fitzgerald & Boland, 2018). The aim of this study is to assess nursing students' stress levels and socialization in correlation with volunteer work with the community outreach dog-walking program. What was the reasoning for student involvement in joining the program? Due to participation, was knowledge about diabetes gained or physical activity increased? These questions are significant for society because remaining healthy via walking is a critical component of someone's lifestyle, whether that be the lifestyle of someone living with type II diabetes, a nursing student, or a volunteer.

Doggone Diabetes, a program integrating dog walking into an exercise program for patients living with type II diabetes, integrates animal-assisted interventions in healthcare and community settings to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. My study titled "*Healthy Human, Healthy Dog, Healthy Nursing Student Volunteer*" was created as an offshoot of the program in order to explore student involvement in community outreach. The study involved a literature review of student engagement with physical activity, specifically focusing on what motivates students to engage in physical activity. In addition, research was done to discover the mo-

tivating factors for people living with type II diabetes to take part in physical activity. There is a lack of current evidence connecting motivation factors to increasing physical activity among student nurses; therefore, the aim of the current research was to evaluate the reasoning behind student engagement to join a community outreach project. I hypothesized that students who joined the Doggone Diabetes program did so because they were motivated by the dogs, and not by their interest in diabetes.

Recruitment for student workers began fall of 2020. In January 2021, 32 students (n=32) expressed interest and attended a training session for Doggone Diabetes. Training included methods of obtaining patient biometric data (weight, body mass index, waist circumference, blood pressure, heart rate, and hemoglobin A1C) and discussing the dog walking portion of the study. Student worker responsibilities included walking with patients living with diabetes on frequent scheduled walks throughout the week and participating in monthly biometric data collection for the Doggone Diabetes participants.

The side study, "*Healthy Human, Healthy Dog, Healthy Nursing Student Volunteer*," was initiated to determine the reason students became involved in community programs. Institutional review board approval was obtained for the study. All students employed by the Doggone Diabetes program were invited to participate in the "*Healthy Human, Healthy Dog, Healthy Nursing Student Volunteer*" study, but data were recorded only for those who consented to the study. Eleven students (n=11) consented and completed the Walking Survey Questionnaire (Figure 1). The Walking Survey Questionnaire was delivered via Qualtrics and data were de-identified. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to determine scores in the Walking Survey Questionnaire. A comparative analysis then took place.

The results (Figure 2) in order of primary reason for

joining the Doggone Diabetes research program, were (1) this is a “paid employment,” (2) “dogs were a part of the program,” and (3) “diabetes was the topic.” The results suggest that the initial study hypothesis was incorrect; the primary reasons for joining the Doggone Diabetes program were due to paid employment and therapy dog presence. Although paid employment was a reason for students to join a community program such as Doggone Diabetes, the impact of the dogs cannot go without notice. There was strong support for having the dogs involved in community outreach as a motivation factor.

A unique aspect of this study is the dogs’ contribution to the study. Auburn University School of Nursing’s trained canines helped to make this study possible, as well as appealing. Another unique aspect is the involvement from the community and the students. Without participation from the community members living with type II diabetes and from nursing students, this study would not have been possible. Further research should be aimed at student engagement in healthy living as it translates to future practice.

**Statement of Research Advisor**

Caroline’s research illustrates the motivation behind student involvement in community outreach and as a faculty, a question I myself have often asked. She explored the incentives faculty can utilize when building projects that not only aid communities but grow future nurses. Covid-19 proved to add more challenges to this project, but Caroline prevailed, and her research lays the groundwork for future studies.

–Morgan Yordy, Nursing

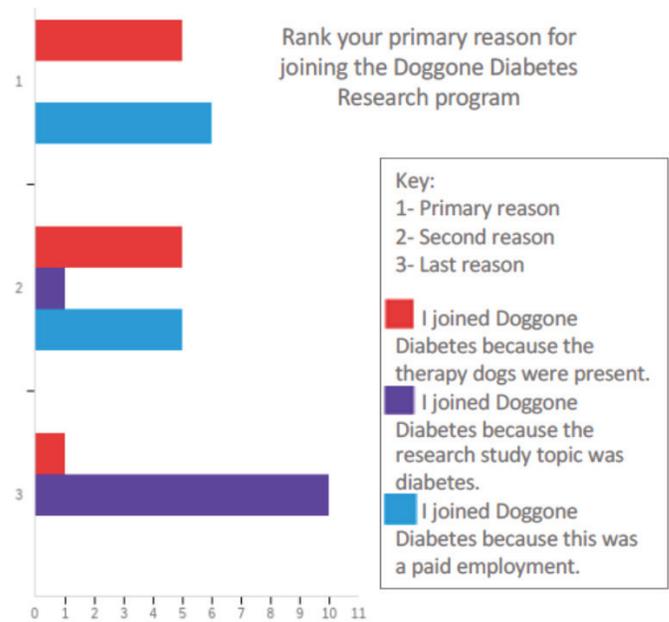


**Walking Questionnaire**  
(1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree)

a. Of the following choices, rank your *Primary* reason for joining this program with 1-as the primary reason to 3-last.

	Primary (first)	Secondary	Tertiary (last)
I joined Doggone Diabetes because the therapy dogs were present.			
I joined Doggone Diabetes because the research study topic was diabetes			
I joined Doggone Diabetes because this was a paid employment			

**Figure 1.** The walking survey questionnaire used in this study.



**Figure 2.** Results of walking survey showing reasons for joining the Doggone Diabetes study.

**References**

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