

## Trazodone as a Mediator of Transitional Stress

### Authors' names and affiliations (3):

- Jennifer Abrams, LVT, BS, MA Affiliations: Animal Care Centers of NYC, New York; Thinking Dog Center, Department of Psychology, Hunter College, City University of New York, New York
- Robin Brennen, DVM Affiliations: Animal Care Centers of NYC, New York; Pets without Vets
- Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiere, BS, MS, PhD Affiliation: Thinking Dog Center, Department of Psychology, Hunter College, City University of New York, New York

Contact information for primary presenter: Jennifer Abrams 646-281-4415 [jabrams@nycacc.org](mailto:jabrams@nycacc.org)

### Abstract

Companion dogs housed in animal shelters are subject to a great number of uncontrollable and unalterable stressors. To combat these stressors and the associated immunosuppression that can result in high contagious illness rates in sheltered dogs, a large open admission municipal animal shelter in New York City introduced trazodone hydrochloride as an anxiolytic to help with their transitional stress.

Dogs were given low doses of trazodone at intake (5 mg/kg), one to two doses within 48 hours of arrival, and illness rates calculated for the months of November and December 2018 at the shelter's Brooklyn and Manhattan Care Center locations. These months were compared to November and December 2017 and 2016, when no trazodone was administered. A total of 1766 dogs were included in the final study.

A statistically significant decrease was found between the no drug condition in 2016/2017 and trazodone condition in 2018,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1766) = 19.4, p < .001$ , as illness rates fell from 41% to 29% with the implementation of trazodone. The average length of stay significantly decreased in 2018 when the trazodone was administered ( $M = 9.23, SD = 6.57$ ), compared to years (2016/2017) when no drug was administered ( $M = 10.47, SD = 8.53$ ),  $t(1764) = 2.71, p = .007$ . Moreover, a significant difference was observed in adoption rates, wherein average adoption rate increased from 30% in 2016/2017 to 42% in 2018,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1766) = 19.4, p < .001$ .

While correlational, the preliminary results of this study suggest that trazodone may be effective in decreasing transitional stress in dogs in a shelter setting, thereby, decreasing illness rates and increasing adoption rates.