



Zorgbeest

## 6. Human-cat interaction

- It is recommended that one person be responsible for the cats (e.g. a permanent cat care giver at the care facility) (Schöberl et al. 2016).
- A good human-cat relationship is based on trust and not forced obedience.
- Focus on a safe and good relationship with the cats, on predictability and controllability (De Keuster et al. 2015).
- The permanent cat caregiver is a “safe haven” for the cats and being around this person should always feel comforting for the cats. Progressively, the cats learn to feel secure around other health care professionals and with patients.
- For these reasons it is important that the permanent cat caregiver at the facility:
  - has, as far as possible, positive interactions with the cats. This improves the cats’ level of sociability (Bergamasco et al., 2010).
  - encourages play and affiliative behaviour in the cats (lowers cortisol levels) (Horvath, 2008), using cat toys.
  - does not use threatening body language with the cats (although the cats should get accustomed to this):
    - Turn sideways instead of walking directly towards the cat (Herron & Schreyer, 2014);
    - Avoid long and direct eye contact (Herron & Schreyer, 2014);
    - Do not lean over the cat (Herron & Schreyer, 2014);
    - Use subtle and flowing movements (Herron & Schreyer, 2014);
    - If necessary, use food (cat treats) to encourage the cat to come to you (Herron & Schreyer, 2014).
  - is present during the initial AAI-sessions. Once trust and confidence is established in the cats, meaning they grew accustomed to the counsellor or patient caregiver, his or her presence can be phased out gradually.