



Therapy Animals in Hospitals and Healthcare Settings

Have you considered bringing therapy animal visitation to your hospital or medical center? Pet Partners is the premier therapy animal program providing qualified volunteers in settings just like yours.

What are the benefits?

- Physiological effects include reduced blood pressure, lower heart rate, and decreased anxiety.
- The presence of therapy animals can bring a sense of normalcy to a hospitalized patient.
- Therapy animals have been found to have a positive effect on patients' pain level and satisfaction with their hospital stay.
- Don't underestimate the power of a therapy animal in a waiting room, chaplain's office or even in the staff break room to reduce stress.

Examples of Interactions

- Astute handlers will have different ways to have clients interact with their animal companions, although petting remains a time-honored way for people to engage with animals.
- Structured interactions can target specific goals, like brushing as a range of motion exercise, giving verbal commands like 'sit' to an animal to benefit patients with dysphagia, or co-walking, where the handler and patient each have a leash can be used to motivate patients to undertake light physical activity.

How to Select Teams

In addition to meeting the basic standards for all therapy animal teams, look for other key characteristics for your particular setting.

- Animals of any size who are calm amidst distraction and comfortable around equipment are best suited to environments which may become unpredictable.
- Education is important. Handlers should have basis in understanding of HIPPA and infection prevention protocols, which you can tailor to your specific needs.
- It's about more than just the animals. Clinical settings can be emotionally challenging, so the handler will be most effective if they are comfortable with medically fragile clients.

Learn More

- Specific guidance about animals in healthcare has been created by The Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America in their 2015 publication *Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks*
- For details about Pet Partners' program and policies which meet the highest standards for safety, visit www.petpartners.org/facilities

Why Choose a Pet Partners Team?

Handler Training

- All Pet Partners handlers complete training prior to registration and have access to continuing education opportunities.
- Pet Partners offers the only handler training on infection prevention publicly endorsed by the Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).
- Pet Partners offers a canine body language course consistent with SHEA guidelines.
- Pet Partners' education underscores the importance of healthy handlers and animals.

Handler and Animal Assessment

- All Pet Partners handlers must pass a written assessment at the time of registration demonstrating knowledge of best practices for safe and effective visits.
- Pet Partners teams are required to pass an in-person, role play based evaluation every two years, more frequently than recommended guidelines, to continue visiting.

Animal Welfare

- The core tenet of Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program is “you are your animal’s best advocate,” also known as YAYABA™. This requires handlers to modify or end interactions animals no longer enjoy, consistent with animal welfare guidelines.
- Pet Partners limits all visits to no longer than two hours, consistent with recommendations to limit overwork and fatigue.
- To register and renew, Pet Partners teams submit animal health screening forms signed by a veterinarian to ensure the overall health of the participating animal.
- Pet Partners ascribes to a relationship based handler-animal support model to be used during visits, a skill on which handlers are assessed during the evaluation process, known to Pet Partners handlers as PETS™.

Safety Standards

- To ensure that policies reflect current scientific information, Pet Partners relies on veterinary advisors, including those with specialization in epidemiology.
- Based on their guidance, requirements for rabies vaccination and grooming are purposefully stringent.
- Policies prohibit raw protein diets, animals with compromised health, and protection dogs.
- Pet Partners has an easily accessible system for incident reporting and a thorough resolution process to determine if a team can resume visiting. When combined with training, Pet Partners has a very low incidence of serious accidents.

