

# **SAMPLE FACILITY POLICY VOLUNTEER THERAPY ANIMAL PROGRAM**

Department: Volunteer Services

POLICY: Volunteer Therapy Animal Visitation Program

## **I. DESCRIPTIONS and RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- A. Assistance (Service) Animals, Therapy animals and private pets will be allowed entry to \_\_\_\_\_ (health care facility) under the provisions set forth by established policies.  
The purpose of this policy is to define the guidelines for Animal Assisted Intervention/ Volunteer Therapy Animal Visitation. Service animals and personal pet visitation are addressed in \_\_\_\_\_ Department policy.
- B. The Volunteer Therapy Animal Visitation Program will be the responsibility the Volunteer Department and \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization).
- C. Animal Assisted Interventions such as the Volunteer Therapy Animal Visitation program are not a part of the patient's plan of care.
- D. Animal-Assisted Therapy is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Interventions are guided, directed and evaluated by a licensed health care professional.

## **II. DEFINITIONS:**

- A. Animal-assisted interventions will be limited to \_\_\_\_\_ (species) at least one year of age who are *currently* registered with \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization) who screens their volunteer animals for medical and behavioral appropriateness; in addition to training of the volunteer handler in protocol for effective therapy animal visitations.
- B. A Therapy Animal Team as defined by \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization) provides opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits based on the Human-Animal Bond, thereby enhancing quality of life. Animal Assisted Interventions are provided in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, and/or volunteers, in partnership with animals that meet specific criteria.

### **III. GUIDELINES:**

#### **A. Program Application and Admission:**

1. Team registration and completion of volunteer training: \_\_\_\_\_ (health care facility) works in collaboration with \_\_\_\_\_(Therapy Animal Organization) to insure that people as well as animals are well-prepared to participate in animal-assisted interventions. Each team must provide \_\_\_\_\_ (health care facility) a current vaccination record and verification of current therapy animal program registration. These documents will be kept on file and replaced with updated documents when vaccinations are updated and team registrations renewed.
2. Application/interview: A volunteer application and background check must be accomplished followed by an interview with the Volunteer Services Manager. If accepted, the handler must complete a general volunteer orientation.
3. Medical screening: The handler must successfully complete a two-step TB test and annual Flu vaccination. Additional screening such as titer analysis or a drug screen may be required.
4. Photo ID badges will be issued for both the handler and animal. The team's therapy animal program ID badge (handler) and collar tag (animal partner) must also be worn at all times.
5. Therapy animal team orientation and training: Once all prerequisites are completed, the team should be shadowed for at least one visit by an experienced \_\_\_\_\_ (health care facility) therapy animal team handler.

#### **B. Therapy Animal Team Visits:**

1. Regularly scheduled visits are encouraged for familiarity. A calendar is developed to reflect the visit schedule. This will assist nurses and therapists in coordinating their schedules with patients.
2. The team will be escorted by another department volunteer during visits. The Escort volunteer will assist with determining the therapy animal team visit locations, placing a barrier (sheet or pillow case) on the bed/ patient lap if the patient chooses to have the animal sit or lay on the bed/chair and acts as a liaison between the therapy animal team and the patients.

3. Both the handler and animal partners must be in good health to visit.
4. Care of the animal: Animals must be clean and dry, odor-free and brushed free of as much loose hair and dander as possible before each visit. Dry shampoo within 24 hours is an acceptable alternative to bathing. Nails must be short with no rough edges. The animal should be maintained on a flea and tick prevention program and inspected before each visit for the presence of any parasites. The animal should be monitored for fatigue and the visit ended if the animal becomes tired. Animals should be given the opportunity to eliminate before coming to the facility in the designated relief area (\_\_\_\_\_). The handler should bring a water bowl to offer drinks during the visit period. Animals must be free of infection or open wounds. Animals receiving antibiotic or immunosuppressive medications are not allowed to visit. Animals in season or pregnant are not allowed to visit.
5. Elimination/accidents: The handler is responsible for cleaning up any elimination that occur inside or outside the hospital. If cleanup is necessary within the building, gloves are to be worn to perform the clean-up. Any organic debris or soiled paper towels shall be placed in a plastic bag in a trash container (similar to the disposal of diapers). Hands shall be washed thoroughly with soap and water after handling pet waste. Environmental Services should be contacted for final clean- up of the area.
6. Control of the animal: Animals must be on a short leash (six feet maximum) and under the handler's direct control at all times while on the grounds and in the hospital. The animal will accompany the handler at all times including into the restroom, as needed. Acceptable collars include:
  - Gentle Leader Halti type collars
  - Body or step-in harnesses
  - Buckle, snap, quick-release collars (leather or fabric)
  - Limited slip collars (Martingales), if they do not include metal links
  - Leashes, no more than 6 feet in length, (leather or fabric leather)
  - Metal hardware, such as buckles, slip rings, and D-rings

NOTE: Choke chains, pinch collars and retractable leashes are not allowed. The Handler is responsible for the animal's behavior at all times and must be able to anticipate and prevent any undesirable actions.

7. Moving around the facility: Therapy animal team visits are permissible only on designated units, and in conjunction with appropriate hospital staff supervision. When using the elevator, Service elevators are preferred. When boarding an elevator, the handler must inquire whether any people onboard have an objection to the animal riding with them. If someone has an objection, the team will wait for the next elevator.
8. Access to Patient Rooms: The Escort volunteer and team will stop at the nurses' station before visiting patient rooms to inquire what rooms/ areas should be avoided in addition to rooms designated as "no visitors", "family only", or isolation precautions. Patients who are sleeping should not be awakened. Before entering a patient's room the Escort volunteer will knock and ask if a therapy animal visit is desired. Entry to the room should occur only after the patient has agreed to the visit. If visiting a semi-private room, both patients and all visitors must indicate approval first.
9. Visiting patients: Follow the \_\_\_\_\_(Therapy Animal Organization) guidelines (see attached):
  - Verify that the patient wants to pet the animal before bringing the animal near them.
  - Wherever the visit takes place, the patient should be seated or lying in bed. If in a wheelchair, the brakes should be locked. If the patient is standing (with or without a walker) the animal should be lifted to avoid bending over or if lifting is not possible, suggest the encounter occur in an area where the patient can be seated.
  - The animal should be taken to the opposite side of the bed from IV tubes drains or equipment.
  - If the animal is requested to get on the bed, the Escort volunteer will place a clean barrier sheet over the bed linens prior to the animal getting on the bed. After the animal leaves the bed, the sheet is to be folded (four corners brought to the center and folded in half again such that the surface in contact with the animal is inside). The barrier is then placed in the dirty linen bin located in the patient's room.

- Hand sanitizer is used by all individuals who have physical contact with the animal **before** and after contact.
  - Handlers should use hand sanitizer upon entering and leaving the patient's room.
  - The length of the visit should be determined by the handler's assessment of comfort levels of patient, visitors, staff and animal partner.
  - Avoid asking a patient how they are feeling or otherwise commenting on their condition.
  - Animal's should avoid licking ("kissing") patients, visitors or staff, even if the person requests.
  - It is inappropriate to discuss a patient's medical condition with the patient or others. (Information regarding HIPAA regulations will be covered during volunteer department orientation.)
  - If safety of a visit is in doubt, the staff should be consulted. Contact the staff if a patient requests help during the visit.
  - Return any furniture or items moved to facilitate the visit back to the original position before leaving the room.
10. Liability: If potential safety hazards occur (eg. patient becomes agitated) or animal stress signals are detected by the handler, the team should leave the room. Incidents, (e.g. scratch wounds) must be reported to the staff in charge, Volunteer Services manager and designated \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization) representatives.
11. Signing In and Out: The team should log in and out of the building for all visits.
12. Maintaining volunteer therapy animal team status: To remain active in the program, the team must maintain a current \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization) team registration and the animal must be current on all vaccinations. Annual facility safety compliance training must be accomplished. Performance competency will be reviewed regularly. Therapy Animal teams who have not participated in the program within 6 months or teams that have not maintained their \_\_\_\_\_ (Therapy Animal Organization) registration will be dropped from the Volunteer Therapy Animal Visitation program. The procedure for re-admission is the same as for new teams.

13. Medication and animal health: If a health problem occurs, the animal will not visit until treatment is complete. The following medications are allowed while the animal is visiting : antihistamines, cardiac drugs, pancreatic enzyme supplementation, gastrointestinal drugs, hormone supplements, urinary tract medications (with the exception of antibiotics), ophthalmic preparations for glaucoma control, insulin and vitamins. Medications which will exclude an animal from visitation are: anthelmintic, antibiotics, antineoplastic agents, expectorants/cough suppressants, optic or ophthalmic preparations for acute or chronic infection and anti-inflammatory agents.

14. Patient Suitability Guidelines:

Care should be taken when evaluating whether a patient is suitable for therapy animal team visitation.

- Patients with the following should be excluded:
  - animal allergy
  - open wounds
  - open tracheotomy
  - immunosuppression (neutrophil count of 2000)
  - isolation precautions of any kind
  - agitated or aggressive patients
  - infected or colonized with tuberculosis, salmonella, Campylobacter, shigella, Streptococcus A (Group A Strep), MRS A, ringworm, Giardia or amebiasis
  - splenectomies (due to heightened susceptibility to dysgenic fermenter type 2 present in normal saliva of dogs [DF2 sepsis])
  - someone with a fear of animals
- Special Considerations:
  - Patients in a coma or altered level of consciousness requires verbal consent from a family member.
  - Pediatric patient interactions requires verbal consent from parent or guardian.
  - Wounds or burns must be covered during the animal visit and the animal shall not come in contact with these areas.
  - Tracheotomies must be capped or patient should have a closed ventilation system.