



The VILLAS VOICE

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Volunteering at Menorah Medical Center

By Linda Dotson

How do you feel when someone says “You made my day” or “You are awesome” or “So glad you take the time to do this” or see tears of joy running down someone’s cheek or a big ole smile on someone’s face because of what you do. That is what I see every time I do my volunteer work at the hospital.

Every Wednesday is pet day! Menorah offers a great opportunity with their Pet Therapy Program. They have volunteer therapy animal teams that come to visit. These teams partner with Mo-Kan Pet Partners. Pet Partners is an international organization that prepares teams to work in animal-assisted activities and animal therapy. Not only do these teams go to hospitals but also schools, nursing homes, libraries, VA centers and community events.

What does the Day in the Life of Volunteering look like? Several teams (The Animal handler which just happens to be the owner and their pet) plus a hospital escort (my role) meet in the lobby. We decide how we are going to divide up our route for the day.

We work for two hours since that is about how much time the pet can last. The teams visit patient rooms, ER, ICU, the Infusion Center and Sarah Cannon Cancer Center. We visit with people walking down the hall and the Staff in all areas we go to. As an Escort, I am the first person the patient will be in contact with. I



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ask the patient if they would like a visit with an animal and if they do I apply sanitizer before and after the visit and prepare them for their great experience. They might just want to pet or a lot of times they want the pet to get on the bed and cuddle with them. Mind you this is probably a 5-minute visit each, but this is when the patients and staff forget why they are there and the stress of their day vanishes even if it might be for a short time. This is when they tell the animal teams how wonderful they are and how much we are appreciated. Patients start talking to us about their pets at home and how much they miss them. They get their phones out and share their stories. Again, it takes just 5 minutes to touch a life and form a bond.

These furry friends definitely improve moods, decrease sadness and anxiety, The unconditional love they have for others is overwhelming. Not only have all the patients and staff shown happiness and joy but as a volunteer we go home with a lot of smiles knowing we made an improvement in someone's day.

If you have any interest in becoming a Pet Partner Therapy Team member, you can visit www.petpartners.org or www.mo-kanpetpartners.org. Feel free to contact me to learn more about escorting. ■

