1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of a pet therapy & visitation program is to provide patients with the positive aspects of stimulation, motivation and cooperation that human/animal interaction can offer in the hospital environment. This form of therapy is used successfully with people in many healthcare settings and literature supports the position that pet therapy increases cooperation with medical treatment and feelings of well-being while decreasing the stress of illness and hospitalization. Our target audience includes all eligible (as defined in this guideline) patients, with an emphasis on those patients who experience long-term hospitalization, and/or demonstrate a need for unconditional love, positive motivation and socialization while involved in their hospital experience.

To allow visitation of appropriately screened therapy dogs and their screened and trained handlers to eligible patients. This guideline will cover residential pets, service, guide animals and patient owned pets as well.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Guide dog - this term shall refer to a dog which is in working harness and is certified to guide blind or hearing impaired persons by an accredited canine school that is engaged in this specific type of training.

Service dog - this shall mean a dog that is certified to assist disabled people by an accredited canine school that is engaged in this specific type of training.

Therapy dog - this shall refer to animals that are brought by specially trained professionals, para-professionals, and/or volunteers to provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life.

Pet animal - this shall refer to any animal which belongs to a patient and whose presence in the hospital is requested by the patient and his physician.

3.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.1 Visitation of any animals to critical care areas, rooms where Additional Precautions are being implemented, medication or clean supply rooms, food storage or preparation areas, and dining rooms is prohibited.

3.2 Service/guide animals care and health is the responsibility of their owners. They will be given access to all areas in the facility except those noted in 3.1 above.
3.3 Rodents, reptiles, and other exotic pets are prohibited without special permission of Infection Control.

3.4 All pet therapy/residential animals will have an approved handler who will be responsible for their health and well being as well as ensuring that they are in compliance with this guideline.

3.5 Handlers will perform hand hygiene after all visitations. The handler will assist the patient in performing hand hygiene prior to leaving the room.

3.6 Screened and trained pet therapy animal handlers must:
- Be individuals from agencies who will fully support these guidelines and any other policies of IHA that may apply to or have bearing on pet therapy programs and the general safety of our patients and families.
- Have submitted an application to and have the approval of the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Be a minimum of eighteen (18) years of age.
- Be a certified and approved member of an approved Therapy Dogs/ Pet Program.

3.7 Appropriately Screened Dogs for the pet therapy or residential program will:
- Be a minimum of one (1) year old.
- Complete the required dog history.
- Require that every animal receives a health evaluation by a licensed veterinarian at least once per year and ensure that vaccinations are current, e.g.:
  - Distemper.
  - Hepatitis.
  - Parainfluenza.
  - Parvovirus.
  - Rabies.
- Defer to the animal’s veterinarian regarding an appropriate flea, tick and enteric parasite control program which should be designed to take into the account the risks of the animal acquiring these parasites specific to its geographic location and living conditions.
- For the protection of both the animal and people, prevent the animal from entering the Healthcare Facility from the onset of and until at least 1 week beyond the resolution of:
  - Episodes of vomiting or diarrhea.
  - Urinary or fecal incontinence.
  - Episodes of sneezing or coughing of unknown or suspected infectious origin.
  - Treatment with non-topical antimicrobials or with any immunosuppressive doses of medications.
  - Open wounds.
  - Ear infections.
  - Skin infections or ‘hot spots’ (i.e. acute moist dermatitis).
  - Orthopedic or other conditions that, in the opinion of the animal’s veterinarian, could result in pain or distress to the animal during handling and/or when maneuvering within the facility.

3.8 Dogs that do not meet screening requirements (regarding consequences for handlers not following the above guidelines, policies or dogs that test positive for lab results):
- The documents supporting these actions will be kept on file with the hospital volunteer coordinator and must be kept up to date. Those in non-compliance with the timely testing of their dogs will be immediately suspended from the program.
- Dogs who test positive in the throat and/or fecal cultures will be immediately suspended from the program.
- One positive Salmonella culture will permanently retire a dog from the program.
- A total of three positive cultures over any period of time, for any of the above stated pathogens or parasites, will permanently retire a dog from the program.

Note: in this document the term “patient” is inclusive of patient, resident or client.
• If a dog has been removed from scheduling due to a positive test that dog will not be scheduled again until the following criteria have been met and documented:
  o For treated parasite or pathogen, a first retest will be performed no sooner than seven (7) days following completion of the prescribed treatment. After two consecutive negative retests (30 days apart), the dog will be able to resume visits.
• Appropriately Screened Cats/Birds for the pet therapy or residential program will:
  o Be full grown animals and not juveniles.
  o Complete the required history.
  o Receive a yearly exam and certificate of good health with all appropriate vaccinations.
  o Have passed a standard temperament test.
  o Be groomed (bathed, nails trimmed) within 24 hours prior to visitation.
  o Not be in estrus (heat) when participating in therapy work.

3.9 Personal Pets
• Pet visitation will be restricted to special situations where the patient care team, doctor, nurses and/or social workers believe such visitation will benefit the patient.
• Pets are limited to cats and dogs and must:
  o Be visiting a specific patient.
  o Be clean and well groomed prior to entering the facility.
  o Have a veterinarian exam and certificate of health, within the past year documenting current immunizations and being free of disease and parasites and in good health.
  o Not be aggressive, hyperactive or difficult to control.
  o Be supervised and contained with leash/cage, by the designated pet handler at all times. This supervision includes any necessary care and cleanup.

4.0 PROCEDURE

4.1 Arranging a visit:
• All visits will be approved by the attending physician.
• The supervising nurse and/or charge nurse will be notified that the animal visit is to occur.

4.2 Appropriate patients for visits:
• Before a patient will be considered eligible for any visitation, the following requirements must be met:
  o Physician consent (by verbal or written order).
• The following patients will not be eligible for dog visitation:
  o Patients on Additional Precautions due to infection.
  o Patients with known immunodeficiency disorders.
  o Patients with known animal allergies.
  o Patients whose physician requests that their patient not receive a visit.
  o Any patient or parent who expresses any concern regarding a visit will not be included in the visit.

4.3 Animal Waste
• If animal waste occurs at anytime during the visit, the dog handler will be responsible for immediately cleaning the area with the approved provided clean-up kit. The handler will be provided with the following materials:
  o Disposable gloves.
  o Plastic bags.
  o A container of a germicidal cleaning agent

Note: in this document the term “patient” is inclusive of patient, resident or client.
• If an animal should develop symptoms of any illness following a hospital visit, the handler will immediately notify the Infection Control Department.

5.0 REFERENCE


5.2 Routine Practices and Additional Precautions for Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Health Care Settings; Public Health Agency of Canada; 2013, P.32.