

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL PROCEDURE

CATEGORY: System-Level Clinical

ISSUE DATE: June 20, 2002

SUBJECT: PET VISITATION and SERVICE ANIMALS

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PURPOSE

Health Sciences North (HSN) has a responsibility to be responsive to an individual's needs in a manner that protects their dignity, enables independence, and ensures access to services. In addition, HSN endeavors to assist with socialization, mental health and emotional healing while ensuring infection and control measures are in place for patient and staff safety.

PROCEDURE

Special Instructions

- Department manager approval is required prior to any visitation arrangements
- Prior to the visit being approved, the Physical Examination Form (See appendix A) must be completed and submitted to the manager/delegate (would require a yearly completion should visits extend past one year)
- If approval is given, the manager will consult with nursing staff for an appropriate time for the visit.
- The patient's pet or service animal must not be allowed to interact with other patients, visitors or staff
- Animals must not have any contact with medical equipment, invasive devices, wounds, dressings or bandages
- Animals must be at least 1 year of age
- **Animals with any of the following conditions are excluded from visiting for 1 week following the resolution of:**
 - Diarrhea
 - Vomiting
 - Sneezing, coughing
 - Antimicrobial, immunosuppressive therapy
 - Skin infections, ear infections

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- If any staff, visitor, or patient sustains an injury from a service animal, complete an Incident Report. The manager will decide if ongoing visits will be permitted
- Arrangements for the visit and results of the visit shall be recorded in Meditech Expanse as instructed by the manager or delegate

Personal Pet/ Emotion Support Animal Visitation

Visiting patient pets shall not:

- Interfere with any treatment (e.g. diagnostics, Physiotherapy, nursing care etc.)
- Cause undue discomfort to any roommate(s). If the patient is in a shared room, the visit will take place without causing discomfort or in a separate room away from others
- Exceed a one hour time limit unless approved by the manager or delegate
- Take place when additional infection control precautions (isolation) are in place or during an outbreak
- Occur where any staff, patient or other has an allergy to the animal
- Be touched or receive care by staff
- Display any aggressive tendencies and the animal is visibly healthy, adequately groomed/clean, and housebroken

The dedicated pet handler is responsible for the animal's actions at all times and will:

- Upon request, provide up to date records of the pet's immunization to the manager or delegate
- Complete the Physical Examination Form (See appendix A) and submit it to the manager or delegate
- Travel with the pet directly from the hospital entrance, to the nursing station, to the patient room
- Have the animal remain in the patient's room with the door closed
- Have cats transported in carriers but can be leashed within the patient's' room
- Have dogs leashed at all times
- Not bring food in for pet or allow the pet to eat the patients food
- The dedicated pet handler must be prepared and have on hand equipment needed to clean any waste from the pet while in/on hospital property/building and to report any incidents

Animal related hand hygiene practices include:

- Patients/residents/dedicated pet handlers – perform hand hygiene before and after animal contact
- Perform hand hygiene after cleaning up pet excrement (Preferably hand hygiene using soap and water)

Recording and Reporting:

Service Animal

- A service animal is not considered a pet but rather an auxiliary aid similar to the use of a cane, crutch or wheelchair.
- Service animals may assist with the following tasks
 - Alerting individuals who are deaf, or hard of hearing
 - Guiding individuals with impaired vision
 - Pulling a wheelchair, opening/closing doors
 - Alerting to seizures or providing mental health support

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- The animal has documentation (e.g. identification card, jacket or harness) showing that training has been obtained through an accredited service animal training school

Responsibility of the Owner

- The service animal must be supervised and the handler must retain full control, and be responsible for the care and behaviour of the animal at all times
- All owners of a service animal must maintain the appropriate certification and documentation to support the role of the service animal. However, the patient is not required to disclose the nature of their disability
- Where possible, arrange for pre-planning and documentation through the appropriate admitting area (e.g. Pre-Admission Unit, admitting physician/clinic) and make reasonable efforts to provide the manager or delegate with advance notice of the use of a service animal
- Notify support departments (e.g. Patient Transport, Medical Imaging) in advance when a patient will be accompanied by a service animal
- Record the name and contact information for a support person that will assume responsibility and provide care for the animal in the event that the owner must be separated from their service animal (e.g. due to isolation, owner is unable to manage service animal, separated from animal during testing)
- Where the service animal is excluded from a prohibited area, an alternate, safe location will be offered where it can wait, if the person is able to be separated from the animal while obtaining the service. The identified support person will be notified to provide care to the animal during this time. Staff will provide assistance to the person with a disability while he or she is separated from the service animal.
- For the purpose of infection control requirements, service animals are permitted in areas commonly accessed by the public but will not be permitted in areas listed in Table 1
- Requests for exceptions will be considered as required by the manager of the department.

Staff responsibility

- Staff should be aware of the following while caring for a patient who is accompanied by a service animal:
 - Allow the service animal to accompany the patient at all times and everywhere on the property except where animals are specifically prohibited (see Table 1)
 - Do not pet, touch or feed a service animal
 - Staff are responsible to care for the patient not the service animal
 - Converse with the owner/handler, not the animal
 - Remember, not all disabilities are visible. The nature of the person's disability is a private matter, and you are not entitled to inquire for details
 - A service animal may wear specialized identifiable harness and vest. All service animals/users have identification cards
- A service animal may be removed, excluded or separated from its owner where it is demonstrated that:
 - The service animal poses a significant risk to the health/safety of others that cannot be mitigated otherwise (e.g. the animal displays vicious, aggressive, threatening behaviour)
 - The owner or delegate is unable to provide care to the service animal

Note: While most service animals are dogs, there are other types of service animals that assist persons with disabilities in their day-to-day activities.

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Table 1 Exclusions

Animals Excluded	Areas Excluded	Other Exclusions
Exotic pets, nonhuman primates, zoo animals Reptiles and amphibians Rodents including hamsters, gerbils, mice, rats and hedgehogs Farm animals (including llamas) Pets from animal shelters Staff and visitor's pets	Food preparation or dining areas Clean/sterile supply storage areas Medication/storage areas Operating rooms and procedure rooms Rooms with immunocompromised patients Dialysis Patients on isolation Patients in critical care, PACU, NICU, and birthing centre	May not be present during any hospital codes or facility/building issues During heightened awareness, a pandemic and/or infectious disease outbreak

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Definitions

1. **Dedicated Pet Handler:** A person who will be dedicated to handle the patient's pet during the pre-approved visit(s). This person will be the sole handler if multiple visits occur and will take full responsibility for the patient's pet or emotional support animal as outlined in this procedure. This person may be a designated family member or friend.
2. **Emotional Support Animal:** An animal that provides companionship to aid in reducing anxiety, depression or loneliness. They are not considered service animals.
3. **Personal Pet:** An animal belonging to the patient that has not undergone specific training to aid the patient, they are not considered service animals. Personal pet visits are usually reserved for long-term or terminally ill patients.
4. **Service Animal:** A service animal is an animal specifically trained to assist people with disabilities in their activities of independent living.

References and Related Documents

Darling, K., APIC Text of Infection Control and Epidemiology, Community-Based Infection Prevention Practices, Chapter 124: *Animals Visiting in Healthcare Facilities*. February 14, 2024.

HSN Accessibility Customer Service Standards - Policy

Infection Prevention and Control Nova Scotia (IPACNS). *Best Practice Guidelines for Reducing Transmission of Antibiotic Resistant Organisms (AROs) In Acute & Long Term Care Settings, Home Care & Prehospital Care For Healthcare Professionals*. March 2012.

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Murphy, R. et al. Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology, *Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks*. Vol. 36(5), pp. 495-516. 2015.

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APPENDIX A: Physical Examination Form (to be completed by a licensed veterinarian)

Date of Examination:			
Pet Name:			
Client's Name:			
Presence of External Parasites:	Yes ☐	No ☐	
General Appearance: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Eyes: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Ears: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Digestive System (including mouth): <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Nervous System: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Musculoskeletal System: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Integumentary System: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Respiratory System: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Urogenital System: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Lymph Nodes: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐
Cardiovascular: <i>(please describe any abnormal findings)</i>			Normal ☐

Statement of Health

This is to certify that, in my opinion, the animal described above is free from demonstrable, contagious or infectious disease and does not show emaciation, lesions of the skin, nervous system disturbance, jaundice or diarrhea.

Veterinarian: _____

Date: _____

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APPENDIX A, cont.: Physical Examination Form (to be completed by a licensed veterinarian)

Fecal Analysis

Date Tested: _____

Test Results: Negative _____ Positive _____

Test Method: _____

Veterinarian: _____ Date: _____