

‘Therapy Dogs’ in the adult intensive care unit (Animal assisted interventions)

Patient information factsheet

What are Therapy Dogs?

- Dog therapy (also known as ‘animal-assisted intervention’) is when patients are visited by specially trained therapy dogs and their handlers.
- You will recognise a therapy dog by the yellow bandana around its neck.



- These dogs are selected for their calm and friendly nature and work in healthcare settings.

Why is dog therapy used in the Adult Intensive Care Unit (ICU)?

- Being in the Adult Intensive Care Unit (ICU) can be a stressful and lonely experience.
- Dog therapy is offered to support your emotional wellbeing during your stay.
- Benefits include:
 - ✓ Reducing anxiety and stress.
 - ✓ Boosting mood and motivation.
 - ✓ Helping to reduce feelings of loneliness.
 - ✓ Providing a sense of comfort and normality.

What happens during a visit?

- You can choose to have the dog visit you and we can design the visit so that you feel comfortable and safe.
- You can choose whether you'd like to pet the dog, talk to the handler, or simply spend time in the dog's company.
- The therapy dog and its trained handler will visit you at your bedside.
- Visits are short, usually lasting around 10 to 15 minutes.

Is it safe?

Yes. Your safety and making sure the experience is clean and hygienic is very important:

- Dogs are fully vaccinated, groomed, and health-checked before visits.
- Handlers follow strict hygiene and infection prevention procedures.
- You will always be asked if you would like to be visited by the therapy dog before a visit takes place.
- Dogs visit patients who are within individual walled bed spaces.
- Dogs **will not** visit patients who are allergic, immunocompromised (have a weakened immune system), or have open wounds, unless specifically approved by the clinical team.
- If a patient in the Unit fears dogs, they will be shielded from it by the closing of doors/blinds/curtains etc. If there is very extreme phobia then we would not have the dog visit the ICU at all whilst that patient is with us. This is also the position if a member of our staff feels the same.

Who can take part?

- Patients who tell their Nurse/Therapist that they would like a visit or their clinical team recommends it.
- Patients who are medically stable and not in isolation.
- Patients who do not have a fear of dogs or are allergic.

Who provides this service?

- Dog therapy in our ICU is delivered in partnership with 'Pets As Therapy', a registered charity providing animal-assisted therapy across the UK.
- Dogs and their handlers undertake certain assessments with 'Pets As Therapy'. Also, our Trust fully vets the volunteer handlers through Occupational Health, references and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and clearance.

Feedback

- We would love to hear your feedback.
- Please let your Nurse or Therapist know if you'd like to share your thoughts or if you have any concerns.

Questions?

If you have questions about dog therapy or want to request a visit, please speak to your Nurse or a member of the ICU team.

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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