

Sample Forms and Policy Outlines:

Therapy Animal Program Policy and Procedure Outline

The following outline may be used as a guide for the development of a comprehensive policy and procedure for the Therapy Animal Program.

Program Purpose: Develop a statement that defines the program purpose.

Identify the Responsible Department/Manager: Departments that are typically listed as the oversight department for the Therapy Animal Program are the volunteer department, human resources and nursing services.

Program Goals: Establish goals for the program.

Definition of Program Staffing: Define the therapy animal and handler as a volunteer team with the Therapy Animal Program. Provide volunteer identifications for both the therapy animal and the handler. Define the days and times a volunteer team may be working in the healthcare facility. A log should be maintained listing when individual volunteer teams are working in the healthcare facility.

Definition of a Suitable Patient/Resident Visitation: Define where the therapy animal visits may take place. Define the types of patients/residents eligible for a therapy animal visit. Define the degree of association a patient/resident may have with the therapy animal (e.g., petting, holding or viewing).

Instructions for Arranging a Therapy Animal Visit: Once patients and family members are aware of the Therapy Animal Program, requests for a visit will occur. A process should be in place for staff to request an appropriate therapy animal visit for their patients and residents.

Healthcare Staff Responsibilities: Staff should be oriented to the Therapy Animal Program. The healthcare facility may require a staff member be in attendance at some or all therapy animal visits. Staff members should be oriented to issues of risk prevention and infection control issues associated with therapy animal visits.

Minimum Requirements of the Therapy Animal: Therapy animals should be certified through an accepted certifying agency defined by the healthcare facility. Physical appearance and animal hygiene requirements should be defined. Current vaccinations and health certificates should be requested and on file for each individual therapy animal.

Minimum Requirements of the Therapy Animal Handler: Therapy animal handlers should meet the same employee health requirements of other volunteers in the organization. In addition, they should be the listed handler for the therapy animal.

Safety Requirements: In addition to review of the healthcare facility's safety and security program, the therapy animal handler should receive instructions and demonstrate techniques regarding safety management of themselves and their therapy animal during unexpected or emergency situations that may occur during their patient/resident visits.

Infection Control Requirements: In addition to proper hygiene for the therapy animal team, a process to manage animal waste matter should be in place. Who will be responsible for cleanup and sanitation should be defined. Areas off limits to the therapy animal team, due to infection control requirements, should be defined. High risk patients who may not receive a therapy animal visit due to their medical condition should be identified.

Orientation and Ongoing Training Requirements for the Program: An orientation program specific for the therapy animal team should be in place. Each team should complete the orientation program prior to beginning therapy animal visits. Annual training and education, including verification of recertification of the therapy animal should be in place for the program.

Annual Review and PI Monitoring: The Therapy Animal Program should meet the healthcare facility's requirements for annual review and performance improvement monitoring. Patient and staff feedback regarding the program should be sought to assist in the annual review.

Minimum Requirements for Resident Animals: Current vaccinations and health certificates should be requested and on file for each individual therapy animal.

Definition of a Certified Therapy Dog: A certified therapy dog has been temperament tested and evaluated for their comfort in the healthcare setting. The dog and handler are certified as a team. Certified therapy dogs are current with all required vaccinations and health clearances. Once certified through a recognized certifying agency, the volunteer therapy dog team is covered by a liability insurance policy. A copy of the verification of liability coverage should be maintained by the oversight department along with all health information for the therapy dog team and orientation/education documentation.

Definition of a Service Animal: Service Animals are animals that are individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities such as guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, or performing other special tasks. The ADA now defines service animals as dogs or miniature horses. All requirements that apply to service animals (dogs) will also apply to miniature horses. Service animals are working animals, not pets.