

## Pets Provide Comfort to Ill Patients

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When under the weather, sometimes your old four-legged pup Petey or long-whiskered cat Chips can provide a calming presence and comfort to you as you heal. For those lengthier illnesses where you may be hospitalized, that comfort is especially important.

According to one study in November 2007 by the *American Journal of Critical Care*, researchers found that in patients diagnosed with advanced heart failure, those who received a visit by a dog and volunteer had reduced blood pressure and heart rate, and an increase in peripheral skin temperature.

The study found that pets offer psychosocial benefits by reducing “anxiety, isolation and fear of procedures and improvements in social interaction, social support, communication, sensory stimulation, and happiness.”

At St. Mary’s Hospital, pets are welcome to visit hospital guests as long as they follow the pet visitation policy. A pet is allowed into the hospital on an individual basis when it would benefit the patient and is suitable in the hospital setting. Non-human primates and reptiles are not allowed.

The director of the unit caring for the patient makes the determination to allow pet visitation and will set up a date and time for the visitation, according to the policy. The hospital’s infection control practitioner and security officer are notified of the arrangements and security officers must escort the furry friend to the patient’s room.

Linda Edwards, a registered nurse in the hospital’s Intensive Care Center, said she has experienced visits by pets and believes the connection to the patient was beneficial.

On both occasions, it was a surprise to the patients and both patients ended up in joyful tears,” Edwards said. “You could see the love, the relief and the new interest in recovery the patients showed following the visits.”

Kathy Franzen, director of Hospice of St. Mary’s, agrees. She said animals are intuitive and know what’s going on. One instance she remembers is when one lady was agitated and medication was not helping to calm her. Franzen said they put the lady’s dog on the bed with her and she ran her hand through its fur and it calmed her down right away.

If you or a loved one plans to have a pet visit the hospital, the following rules must be adhered to:

- The pet must be healthy, vaccinated, well cared for, well behaved and recently groomed.
- The pet should not be fed within two hours of the visit.
- The pet must be contained during transport through the hospital, such as a handheld carrier or leash.
- Encourage the pet to relieve itself prior to the visit.
- The pet is not allowed to come into