

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SYSTEM AUTHORITY
POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

SUBJECT:	POLICY NO.:	7207.06
	APPROVED DATE:	11/12/08
ANIMALS IN THE VCU HEALTH SYSTEM	EFFECTIVE DATE:	12/30/08
	REVIEWED DATE:	11/01/90
		07/16/93
		09/14/95
		06/29/00
		08/27/03
		07/27/06
		05/29/08
	SUPERSEDES NO:	7207.05

I. PURPOSE:

To accommodate the entry, presence, and visitation of animals at the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCUHS) as service animals, as part of the Dogs-on-Call Program, and patient's pets that have been approved for visitation, while recognizing the need to reduce the risk of exposing patients, employees, and visitors to communicable diseases that might be transmitted from contact with animals.

II. POLICY:

- A. VCUHS allows trained Health System volunteers to bring their dogs to the Health System to visit in prescribed areas on a designated schedule. Volunteers must have completed all the requirements to be a Health System volunteer and their dogs must have met all the requirements to participate in the Dogs-on-Call Program.
- B. Patients on isolation will not participate in the Dogs-On-Call Program.
- C. Patients with active infections, intravenous treatment, open wounds, and/or dog dander allergies will not participate in the Dogs-On-Call program without the permission of their physician entered into the patient's medical record.
- D. Patient's pets are allowed on a case-by-case basis in VCUHS when accompanied by a physician's order and deemed beneficial for the well being of the patient.
- E. Animals, other than service animals, are only permitted in areas approved by Risk Management, Infection Control, and/or the Attending Physician.
- F. Service animals are permitted in all areas of VCUHS with the exception of the Operating and Delivery Rooms. Service animals will be permitted in the ICUs, procedural areas, or areas with immuno-compromised patients only with approval of Epidemiology.
- G. The VCUHS reserves the right to have a VCU veterinarian or veterinary assistant examine an animal during normal business hours to determine that the animal is free of disease and parasites prior to allowing access to the Health System. Such an examination may take place at any time during an animal's visit or stay.
- H. Employees may not bring their animals to work unless the animal is a service animal or a participant in the Dogs-On-Call program.

III. DEFINITIONS:

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) - A goal-directed intervention in which an approved dog is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is directed and/or delivered by a health/human service professional with a specialized expertise and within the scope of practice of his/her profession.

Direct Threat - A significant risk of substantial harm.

Dogs-on-Call - VCUHS pet visitation and animal-assisted therapy program in which approved dogs, including facility trained dogs, and volunteers provide motivational, educational, recreational and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life.

Facility Trained Dog - Facility dogs are typically paired with healthcare professionals and are specialty trained to be consistently present in a specific type of facility. Facility dogs carry out most of the commands of a service dog.

Patient's Pets - For the purposes of this policy, includes only dogs and cats that are owned by the patient.

Reasonable accommodation - Any change in the environment or in the way things are usually done that results in equal opportunity of employment, service or access for an individual with a disability.

Service animal s - Animals that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Tasks performed by service animals may include guiding people with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to the presence of others or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, or retrieving dropped items.

STAFF - As defined in this policy, Employees and Non-Employees who provide VCUHS customer service or participate in educational activities at VCUHS.

Undue Hardship - An action that is excessively costly, extensive, substantial or disruptive or that would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the business.

Volunteer - An individual who provides help or services to VCUHS without compensation through the Volunteer Services Department.

IV. PROCEDURES: For the purpose of this policy, there will be a distinction made between requirements applied to service animal s, those applied to Dogs-On-Call, and procedures for visitation by a patient's pet within the VCU Health System.

A. **Service animals:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that VCUHS "permit use of a service animal by an individual with a disability." It is intended that the Health System take the necessary steps to accommodate service animals and ensure that individuals with disabilities remain with their service animals, unless doing so would jeopardize or fundamentally alter safe operations.

1. **Outpatients:** Service animals of outpatients shall be permitted to accompany their owners in public waiting areas. Decisions as to whether service animals may be allowed to accompany their owners in other areas will be made on a case-by-case basis. Permission would be granted after taking into consideration the following factors:

- a. the patient's diagnosis, treatment and care requirements;
- b. the condition and behavior of the service animal ;
- c. the medical risk of infection posed by the service animal to the patient and others; and

- d. the extent to which the presence of the service animal in other areas would alter the services provided by VCUHS or impair the safety of its operations.
2. **Inpatients:** Service animals of inpatients are generally permitted to remain with their owners during the inpatient stay. Decisions in this regard will be made on a case-by-case basis, taking the following factors into consideration:
- a. the patient's diagnosis, treatment and care requirements;
 - b. the condition and behavior of the service animal ;
 - c. the medical risk of infection posed by the service animal to the patient and/or roommate in semi-private situations; and
 - d. the extent to which the presence of the service animal would alter the services provided by VCUHS or impair the safety of its operations.
 - e. temporary separation of the service animal and inpatient may be necessary from time to time. In these situations, the animal must be contained in a patient-provided crate or carrier.
3. **STAFF:** VCUHS will attempt to provide reasonable accommodation to staff who require use of a service animal in order to meet the essential functions of their position provided the use of the service animal does not impose an undue hardship or that the presence of the service animal does not pose a direct threat that cannot be eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level with reasonable accommodation.
4. **Visitors** accompanied by a service animal: The general requirements established in the Inpatient Visitation Policy will be followed.
- a. When an individual accompanied by a service animal requests a visitor's pass, the Information Desk staff will determine if the animal appears healthy and clean prior to issuance of a visitor's pass.
 - b. The Information Desk staff will contact the nurse manager, or designee, of the nursing unit to ascertain if access for the service animal is appropriate, and if so, inform the unit that a visitor assisted by a service animal will arrive shortly.
 - c. The visitor must comply with any infection control precautions upon arrival on the unit, and before direct contact with a patient.
5. Responsibilities of Patients, Visitors, and staff bringing service animals into VCUHS:
- a. Service animals must be clean, healthy and current on vaccinations.
 - b. Patients (or their families) and visitors should make arrangements at their own expense for feeding, exercise, care, and supervision of their service animal.
 - c. Patients, visitors, and staff shall ensure that there is no physical contact between their service animals and other Health System patients or staff. Patients, visitors, and staff shall assume all liability for the behavior and actions of their service animals.

6. If at any time, a service animal of a patient/visitor is denied access to VCUHS, the involved staff should complete a Patient Safety Net (PSN) report. The Health System Administrator on Call or designee will provide for reasonable accommodation and will inform the patient/visitor in writing of the decision and the reason(s) for the denial. A copy of this letter shall be filed with Health System Administration, Risk Management, and Patient Relations.
 7. Should a service animal of a staff member be denied access, Human Resources must be notified to address reasonable accommodation issues for the staff member.
- B. Dogs-On-Call is coordinated by the Center for Human-Animal Interaction and the Volunteer Services Office.
1. Requirements for Volunteers:
 - a. Volunteers who wish to participate in the Dogs-On-Call program must complete all the requirements needed to be a volunteer in good standing in the Health System. This includes:
 - i. Application, Interview and Screening: Screening includes but is not limited to a criminal background check, reference checks and a pre-placement health assessment for specific areas of service.
 - ii. Training: Training includes Health System safety, emergency procedures, and infection control plus specific training in AAT and/or Dogs-On-Call with their dog in the Health System setting.
 - iii. Participating in annual reorientation, annual health screening and in any other activities or training required by VCUHS.
 2. Requirements for Dogs-On-Call Dogs:
 - a. Dogs must be at least one year of age.
 - b. It is highly recommended that dogs be spayed or neutered.
 - c. Owners who are considering becoming Dogs-On-Call volunteers must complete with their dogs either the Delta Society Pet Partners Program, Therapy Dogs International Program (TDI), or obtain a facility trained dog from Canine Companions for Independence. Facility dog training must be specific to the type of VCUHS facility to be visited.
 - d. Volunteers must submit all paperwork related to certification/registration along with current and renewal vaccination records and certification/registration renewal to the VCU Center for Human-Animal Interaction.
 - e. The Dogs-On-Call program is scheduled monthly; however, there may be times when the volunteer is asked to come at alternate times.
 3. Procedures for the Dogs-On-Call Program:
 - a. Prior to participation in the Dogs-On-Call program, unit staff will obtain verbal permission from the patient and/or family for visitation. Patients and families have the right to refuse to participate in the Dogs-On-Call program at any point during their stay.
 - b. Prior to participation in AAT, the health care provider will consult with the patient's attending physician to discuss treatment goals and how AAT will be used as a therapeutic intervention.

Patient response to AAT will be entered in the patient's medical record. Patients and families have the right to refuse to participate in AAT at any point during their stay.

- c. Visitation will occur at a time coordinated in advance by the floor staff, the Center for Human-Animal Interaction staff, or by the Volunteer Services staff.
- d. Dogs must be bathed and groomed within one day of the visit. For dogs visiting more frequently than once a week, dogs must be thoroughly groomed just prior to each visit and bathed weekly.
- e. Dogs must be free of illness and/or infection.
- f. Dogs must be free of wounds or sores and have a healthy coat and skin.
- g. Dogs must be firmly under their handler's control and be well behaved.
- h. Female dogs may not visit while in estrus.
- i. Dogs may enter the unit either in a carrier or on a leash and will remain on a leash at all times.
- j. Dogs will be removed from dining areas during meals.
- k. If the dog becomes disruptive, it must be promptly removed from the unit. Dogs that are not well behaved or are not under their handler's control will have visitation privileges revoked.
- l. Dogs will not enter patient rooms or be allowed on patient beds without permission by the patient's nurse and/or physician. When such permission is given, a towel or sheet must be placed between the dog and the patient's bed.
- m. Patients on isolation will not participate in the Dogs-On-Call program.
- n. Patients with active infections, intravenous treatment, open wounds, and/or dog dander allergies will not participate in the Dogs-On-Call program without the approval of their physician entered into the patient's medical record. In such instances, for any physical contact with patients that does occur, strict hand washing or cleansing will take place immediately before and after patient contact with the dog. Volunteers must make sure that physical contact does not occur between the dog and any open wounds or intravenous therapy sites.
- o. Health System infection control policies and procedures will be enforced throughout the dog visit. Strict hand washing by staff and patients will occur before and after contact with the dog. Use of alcohol-based hand cleaning gel is recommended.
- p. If the dog remains on the unit longer than one hour, the dog will be taken outside for elimination needs. Dogs should be taken to outside areas that are free from pedestrians for elimination purposes. Handlers are responsible for bagging and appropriately discarding solid waste.
- q. Any dog excrement found within the VCUHS facilities will be cleaned up and/or bagged by the handler. VCUHS Staff will disinfect the area immediately, wearing gloves throughout the cleaning procedure.

C. Procedures for Visitation by a Patient's Pet:

1. A written physician's order authorizing the visit must be present in the patient's medical record.
2. The handler must coordinate the patient's pet visitation date and time with unit staff and be given a copy of the patient education handout "Pet Visitation" (Attachment A).
3. Unit staff will document in the Patient/Family Education Record that the Pet Visitation handout has been reviewed with the patient and the pet handler and that they have verbalized an understanding of the instructions.
4. The handler must provide documentation of current vaccinations.
5. The pet must be brought into the Health System in a closed carrier or on a leash if too large for a carrier.
6. The handler will also comply with Procedures IV.B.3.d. through q., above (as applicable to the pet).

V. RESOURCES:

- A. Health System Administration - 828-8106
- B. Risk Management - 828-1707
- C. Epidemiology - 828-2121
- D. Center for Human-Animal Interaction - 827-7297; P. O. Box 980710, Richmond, VA 23298-0710).
- E. Department of Patient Relations - 628-0400
- F. Delta Society Pet Partners Program - www.deltasociety.org
- G. Therapy Dogs International Program (TDI) - www.tdi-dog.org
- H. Human Resources - 628-9433

VI. REFERENCES:

- A. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.
- B. Canine Companions for Independence - www.caninecompanions.org
- C. Delta Society Pet Partners Program - www.deltasociety.org
- D. Health System Policy 7201 Inpatient Visitation
- E. Health System Policy 7204 Reports of Unusual Occurrences/Patients and Visitors
- F. "Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities: Recommendations of CDC and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee." Document available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm.
- G. Patient Education Handout "Pet Visitation" - Attachment A, or may be printed through the Patient Education feature in the Clinical Information System.

VII. REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

- A. Director, Center for Human-Animal Interaction
- B. Director, Volunteer Services
- C. Human Resources
- D. Epidemiology

APPROVED:

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