

Animals in the Hospital

VCU Health System Authority and Affiliates Policy

Effective Date: 12/04/2021

Revision: 1.0

This policy applies to Virginia Commonwealth University Health System Authority and all of its wholly owned or controlled affiliates (collectively referred to herein as VCUHS or VCU Health System).

This policy applies to the facilities marked below:

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VCU Medical Center | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Memorial Hospital | <input type="checkbox"/> VCU Health Children's Services at Brook Road |
| <input type="checkbox"/> VCU Health Ambulatory Surgery Center L.L.C | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Memorial Hospital (Hundley Center) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VCU Health Tappahannock Hospital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MCV Associated Physicians d/b/a MCV Physicians | <input type="checkbox"/> CMH Physician Services, LLC | |
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General Information

Responsible Department:

Center for Human Animal Interaction
Epidemiology
Risk Management

Responsible Individuals / Who Performs:

Team Members

Background

Research studies document the benefits of human-companion animal interaction and animal-assisted therapy in healthcare settings (Examples of such research can be found here: [Abstracts of published studies by Center for Human-Animal Interaction Investigators](#)).

This policy allows for the provision of this evidence-based activity while recognizing the need to reduce risk of exposing patients, employees, and visitors to communicable diseases that might be transmitted from contact with animals.

There are also questions which arise around service animals in the environment, specifically how these differ from emotional support, therapy, and facility animals and what restrictions are allowed to be placed on these types of animals.

Purpose

The Animals in the Hospital policy applies to all VCU Health locations. While pet visitation and the Dogs on Call program may not be currently available at all locations, upon activating those services, this policy will apply.

To provide information on non-research animals brought into the VCU Health System.

For information on research animals contact VCU's Animal Care and Use Program (ACUP).

Definitions

Term:	Definition:
Therapy Animal	A non-human animal that has been evaluated to interact safely with a wide range of populations. These animals work with their handler/owner to visit and interact with various people in different settings (e.g., hospitals, assisted living facilities, schools, etc.).
Service Animal	Any dog or miniature horse individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability. Tasks performed can include, pulling a wheelchair, retrieving dropped items, alerting person to a sound, reminding a person to take a medication, or pressing an elevator button.
Emotional Support Animal	A non-human animal not formally trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability including, but not limited to, a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. May be any species, such as goat, llama or snake. Under this policy they are treated as companion animals.
Companion Animal	Any non-human animal not classified as a service, facility, or therapy animal.

Policy

- A. The VCU Health System does not discriminate against any individual on the basis of disability.
- B. All animals must be kept in a carrier or on a leash in all areas of VCU Health. If leash or carrier interferes with a service animal's work, or the individual's disability prevents using these devices, the service animal's handler must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.

- C. Animals that pose a direct threat to the health and safety of patients, visitors, or team members, or who fundamentally alter team members; abilities to provide essential services, may be asked to be removed from the area.
- D. At no time are animals allowed in sterile areas or areas that require a protected environment (e.g., operating rooms).
- E. Accommodations will be made for a service animal when their handler, who is a patient, is unable to safely care for them due to a medical or behavioral condition. Contact Risk Management for assistance at 804-808-1707 or, if after hours, the Clinical Administrator via pager #6107.
- F. Therapy Animals
 - F.1. The only therapy animals permitted on VCU Health System premises are dogs, which are allowed to visit patients, visitors, or team members.
 - F.2. Therapy dogs may only interact with VCU Health System patients, visitors, or team members after meeting the Dogs on Call program requirements as set forth by the Center for Human-Animal Interaction, located in the VCU School of Medicine. See this website for an overview of [Dogs on Call Program](#) requirements.
 - F.3. Both handler and dog must meet all annual requirements as specified by the Center for Human-Animal Interaction in order to maintain good standing in the Dogs on Call program.
 - F.3.1. For more information, or to request a visit, contact the Center for Human-Animal Interaction at CHAI@VCUHealth.org, or by phone at 804-827-PAWS (7297), or use pager #6134.
- G. Emotional Support Animals
 - G.1. Under this policy, emotional support animals as defined above, are treated as companion animals (see Section H below).
- H. Companion Animals (Pets)
 - H.1. Companion animals are not allowed inside VCU Health Building unless they are service animals, or they meet the requirements of either Dogs on Call or the Patient Pet Visitation Requirements listed below:
 - H.1.1. Only patients who have been admitted as inpatients for a period of more than 24 hours are eligible to receive a visit from their pet.
 - H.1.2. Only companion animals that are dogs are allowed to visit hospitalized patients, and only one dog may visit at any given time.
 - H.1.3. The dog must be handled by an adult who is not the patient, willing and capable of taking full responsibility of the animal during the visits. This person is required to

appropriately manage the dog's behavior and attend to their welfare needs for the duration of the visit.

H.1.4. The dog will be brought into the hospital in an appropriately-sized dog crate or carrier, and may only be taken out of the crate or carrier in the patient's room.

H.1.5. The dog is not allowed to interact with anyone other than the patient.

H.1.6. Each individual visit may not exceed two hours, and only one visit is allowed per day.

H.1.7. To schedule a visit, follow the Patient Pet Visitation procedures detailed in the procedure section below.

I. Service Animals

I.1. A service animal may only be a dog or a miniature horse. No other species currently qualify under the Americans with Disability Act.

I.2. Service animals are allowed access to areas of the VCU Health System that are open to the general public when accompanying a patient or visitor with a disability.

I.3. A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove their service animal from public areas of the VCU Health System unless the service animal poses a direct threat to the health and safety of patients, visitors, or team members, or fundamentally alters team members' abilities to provide essential services.

I.4. Service animals are not excluded from such areas unless an individual patient's situation or a particular animal poses greater risk of infection or injury which cannot be mitigated through reasonable measures.

I.5. At no time are service animals allowed in sterile areas and areas that require a protected environment.

I.6. Service animals are allowed in intensive care units, procedural areas, and areas with immunocompromised patients after consultation with the patient's Provider or designee, appropriate area Nurse Manager, and Epidemiology.

I.7. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, team members must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain services without the animal's presence.

I.8. Team members may not require proof of certification or any other evidence of service animal status, as service animals are not required to wear vests, patches, or harnesses that identify them as such.

I.9. If it is not immediately obvious that the animal is a service animal, team members may ask two (2) specific questions to determine if the animal is a service animal:

1. Is the animal required because of a disability?
 2. What specific task has the animal been trained to perform?
- I.10. Patients and visitors with service animals are responsible for their care and control, including feeding, exercising, and toileting.
- I.11. Team members are not required to provide water, food, exercise, or toileting of the service animal.

Procedure

1. Handlers unable to care for their service animal:
 - 1.1. Advise the patient or visitor to make arrangements with a family member or friend to come to the hospital or clinic to provide these services if the patient or visitor is unable.
 - 1.2. Contact Risk Management at 804-828-1707, the Clinical Administrator via Telepage #6107, or Social Work if patient is unable to care for the service animal and does not have anyone available to provide services to the animals in their stead.
2. Animals posing a direct threat or fundamentally altering the provision of essential services:
 - 2.1. Ensure the patient's attending or designee will collaborate with the nurse manager of the patient's assigned unit, epidemiology, and Risk Management as appropriate to assess on an individual basis.

The individualized assessment will be based on reasonable judgment that relies on current medical knowledge, or on the best available objective evidence, to determine:

 - The nature, duration, and severity of the risk;
 - The probability that the potential injury will actually occur; and,
 - Whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, procedures, or provision of auxiliary aids will mitigate the risk.
 - 2.2. Offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence when there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed.
 - 2.3. Explain to the patient or visitor the rationale for not allowing or disallowing the service animal.
 - 2.4. Assist the patient or visitor with making alternative arrangements for the service animal.

- 2.5. Document in the patient's medical record the rationale of separating the service animal from the owner.

3. Patient Pet Visitation Procedures

- 3.1. Verify that the visit has been approved by the patient's Medical Provider or their designee, the area Nurse Manager, and Epidemiology, and that an order has been entered authorizing the visit.
 - 3.1.1. Visitation by a patient's pet is limited to dogs only.
- 3.2. Contact the Center for Human-Animal Interaction to coordinate the date and time of visit. This process should include the area Nurse Manager or their designee.
- 3.3. Request updated documentation of the dog's vaccination status and place it in the patient's medical record. Within the last twelve months, the dog must have:
 - 3.3.1. Annual wellness exam performed;
 - 3.3.2. Current negative fecal exam performed; and
 - 3.3.3. Current rabies vaccination or rabies titer performed within the last two years.
- 3.4. Advise handler that the dog must be bathed within 24 hours prior to the visit.
- 3.5. Provide the patient and handler with a copy of Instructions for Visitation by Patient's Pet. This document can be obtained by sending an email request to the Center for Human-Animal Interaction at CHAI@VCUHealth.org.

Related Documents

[Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA](#)

[Canine-Assisted Interventions in Hospitals: Best Practices for Maximizing Human and Canine Safety](#)