

Animals in the Hospital

VCUHS Policy

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General Description

Purpose: To accommodate the entry, presence and visitation of non-service animals at the VCU Health System.

Background: Research studies document the benefits of human-companion animal interaction and animal-assisted interventions in healthcare settings. (See abstracts of The Center for Human-Animal Interaction studies and other human-animal interaction research at HABRI Central) This policy will allow 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.

Scope: When a patient wants to have their pet visit the hospital.
When a request is made for a non-service animal to visit the hospital or its patients.

Responsibility: Center for Human-Animal Interaction
Epidemiology
Care Providers

Policy

- A. Only dogs and their owners/handlers who meet the Dogs On Call program requirements (see below) as set forth by the VCU School of Medicine's Center for Human-Animal Interaction are permitted to visit VCUHS patients, visitors or employees.

- B. Patients may be visited by their own pets with a physician's order authorizing the visit so long as they comply with the Patient's Pet Visitation Procedure.
- C. Patients on contact precautions may have pet visits with a physician's order, otherwise volunteers cannot conduct visits with those patients.
- D. Dogs On Call volunteers must comply with all visitation restrictions as set forth by the VCU School of Medicine Center for Human-Animal Interaction.
- E. Service animals are permitted in all areas of VCU Health System with the exception of the Operating and Delivery Rooms. With the approval of Epidemiology, service animals may be permitted in the ICUs, procedural areas or areas with immunocompromised patients.

Please Be Aware Employees may only bring their dogs to work if they are participating in the Dogs On Call Program

DOGS ON CALL (DOC) REQUIREMENTS

General Requirements

- Dog Owners/Handlers must complete the requirements of VCU Health Volunteer Services to volunteer with DOC at any VCU Health site.
- Volunteers must wear their VCU Health Volunteer I.D. at all times in the VCU Health facilities. Volunteers are encouraged to wear their official DOC blue polo shirt and use the DOC vest/bandana, and DOC dog leash. This attire helps to identify DOC teams to patients, families and staff.
- DOC teams must have passed **EITHER** 1) Pet Partner Evaluation (www.petpartners.org) and be registered with Pet Partners (PP) **OR** 2) The AKC Canine Good Citizenship test (www.akc.org/events/cgc) **AND** be registered with Alliance of Therapy Dogs. (ATD; www.therapydogs.com).
- Documentation of current PP or ATD registration must be submitted to The Center for Human-Animal Interaction.
- Participation in DOC requires completion of DOC Orientation and annual renewal shadowing by DOC.
- Participation in the DOC program requires annual documentation of veterinary wellness visits and current rabies vaccination submitted to The Center for Human-Animal Interaction.
- Participation in the DOC program requires volunteers to comply with all procedures outlined in the DOC Manual provided to all new DOC members.

- Volunteers may only visit in approved areas. Visits to pediatric units must be cleared and coordinated with Heather Rossi, Senior Child Life Specialist. Visits to adult units must be arranged through a member of Center staff.
- VCUHS reserves the right to have a VCU veterinarian or veterinary assistant examine a dog during normal business hours to determine that the animal is free of disease and parasites prior to allowing access to VCU Health sites. Such an examination may take place at any time during the dog's visit.
- Dogs must be under the handler's control at all times. Dogs that are not well behaved or not under the handler's control will have visitation privileges revoked.
- Volunteers will be provided with a Dogs On Call Manual when accepted into the DOC Program. Volunteers are expected to become familiar with the manual and must follow all procedures as outlined.

Dog Requirements

- Dogs must be at least one year of age. It is also recommended that dogs be spayed or neutered.
- Dogs must be bathed and groomed no more than 24 hours before the visit. For dogs visiting more frequently than once a week, dogs must be thoroughly groomed just prior to each visit and bathed weekly. Nails must be trimmed and teeth cleaned prior to visits.
- Dogs must be free of illness and/or infection.
- Dogs must not have been fed a raw diet within at least 30 days of visitation.
- Dog must not have consumed 'Pork Hide' or 'Pig Ear' treats within at least 30 days of visitation.
- Dogs must be free of wounds/sores and have a healthy coat and skin.
- Dogs must be well behaved and firmly under the handler's control at all times. Be aware of your dog's stress and comfort level and do not visit if you feel your dog will not enjoy the visit.
- Dogs may not wear flea collars.
- Dogs may not be treated with flea medication (i.e. Frontline, Advantix) within 24 hours of the visit.
- Female dogs may not visit while in estrus.
- Dogs must wear an appropriate collar or harness in good condition. Muzzles, chain collars, prong collars and Gentle Leaders are prohibited.
- Dogs must be on a 4 foot leash. Dogs must be leashed at all times. Retractable leashes are not permitted.
- If disruptive, dogs must be promptly removed from the unit.

Required Visitation Procedures

- Volunteers must schedule planned visits using the online Dogs On Call Rallyhood calendar.
- Volunteers must sign in and out in Volunteer Services upon arrival and departure for every visit.
- Volunteers must check in with the nursing staff in each hospital unit where visits will occur.

- Volunteers must obtain permission from the patient and/or family before entering a patient's room. If the patient is sharing a room, permission must also be obtained from both patients and/or families. Patients and families have the right to refuse a DOC visit at any time.
- Dogs are not allowed on patient beds without permission. If your dog is of a reasonable size, he/she may be allowed on the bed if there is a towel or sheet placed between the dog and the patient's bedding. Unit staff can provide this for you. A new towel/sheet must be used for each patient.
- Dogs must have no physical contact with any patient areas where there are open wounds or intravenous treatment.
- Dogs and volunteers must not enter any patient room where a "contact precaution" sign is posted.
- VCU Health infection control policies and procedures will be enforced during all DOC visits. Strict hand washing by staff and patients must take place **before and after contact with a dog** using VCU Health-approved hand sanitizer.
- Dogs must be removed from any dining areas during patient meals.
- Volunteers are encouraged to take their dogs out for a break if visiting in the hospital for more than one hour.
- Volunteers should limit total hospital visit time to a maximum of two hours.
- Volunteers are responsible for properly bagging and discarding any solid waste. If an "accident" occurs in the hospital, it is the volunteer's responsibilities to (1) clean the area, (2) bag the waste and (3) ask a staff member to disinfect the area immediately.