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## **PET FACILITATED THERAPY GUIDELINES**

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### **GUIDANCE FOR ANIMALS IN NURSING HOMES**

The concept of Pet Facilitated Therapy (PET), or the use of companion animals as instruments of rehabilitation, is emerging as a natural and effective therapeutic modality. In many states animals are being introduced, with increasing frequency, into a variety of institutional settings and are proving to be able adjuncts in the treatment of the mentally, physically and emotionally disabled.

#### **VISITING ANIMALS**

- A. It is suggested that the owner of any cat or dog visiting or residing in an institution, be required to have a completed health certificate issued semi-annually from a licensed veterinarian, certifying that:
1. The cat or dog is free of external parasites, specifically fleas, ticks, lice and mites.
  2. The cat or dog is free of internal parasites, specifically hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms, whipworms and Strongyloides.
  3. The cat or dog is free of contagious diseases and poses no disease threat to human beings.
  4. The cat or dog is free of heartworms.
  5. All necessary immunizations (e.g. required by law or recommended by the veterinarian) and required licenses by the jurisdiction of residence are current.
  6. The cat or dog is of apparently sound temperament, free of obvious behavior problems such as fear-biting, hyperactivity, or abnormal aggression.

## **ANIMALS IN NURSING HOMES**

- B. Acquiring a cat or dog for institutional therapy programs places demands upon the institution to ensure the welfare of the cat or dog and the protection of residents from injury related to the animal.
1. The cat or dog will be provided with proper living accommodations.
  2. The cat or dog will be fed an appropriate food recommended by a veterinarian.
  3. An enclosed outdoor area will be available to the dog to relieve itself and to exercise. If such a protected area is not available, the institution will agree to walk the dog on a leash several times a day. A litter box for a cat must be accessible and cleaned on a daily basis. Someone will be responsible for clean up if the animal accidentally defecates or urinates on the floor or furniture.
  4. The institution will agree to provide the cat or dog with the proper monthly medication for the prevention of heart worms.
  5. The institution will agree to take the cat or dog to a veterinarian semi-annually to update its health certificate according to the criteria established above and at any other time medical care is indicated.
  6. The institution will agree to protect the cat or dog from abuse by residents or staff.
  7. The institution will agree to provide facilities for selected pet-resident contact and will see to it that no resident is forced into contact with a cat or dog if he or she does not wish it.
  8. The institution will agree not to allow the cat or dog to be present in eating areas, food preparation areas, or medical treatment areas. The institution will agree to name someone as primarily responsible for the care of the cat or dog.
  9. All dog bites must be reported according to law. All dog bites and cat scratches on employees, or patients must be attended to by the supervising physician or nurse for first aid and/or other medical attention, as needed.

## **GUIDELINES FOR BIRDS AS PETS IN NURSING HOMES**

- C. The following special guidelines apply to birds only:
1. Nursing facilities should have a signed certificate from a veterinarian certifying the bird/flock is free from disease including psittacosis, coccidiosis and giardiasis (in stool), and free of lice. This examination should be completed prior to acceptance of the bird's admission to the facility and must be repeated annually. Examinations must include screening of birds for infection with *Chlamydophila psittaci*, the agent

of psittacosis. Specific screening protocols should be established in consultation with a veterinarian. Information on testing or screening protocols is available in the most recent *Compendium of Measures to Control Chlamydophila psittaci Infection Among Humans (Psittacosis) and Pet Birds (Avian Chlamydiosis)*, published by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (<http://www.nasphv.org>).

2. The facility should have the birds examined whenever their health is in question.
3. The facility should retain all health certificates, an individual bird's illness and treatment record and any random health testing results.
4. Any resident or staff member that handles a bird or bird caging should thoroughly wash or sanitize his or her hands immediately after contact.
5. The facility should have written policies/procedures governing the care and feeding of the bird(s), and a monitoring system to ensure the policies/procedures are carried out. At a minimum, these policies should contain the following items:
  - a. Birds should never be placed by a window as draft or sunlight can be detrimental
  - b. Observation for nail and beak length to see if they need trimming.
  - c. Never position a bird over a heater.
  - d. Do not use string or other material to fasten the doors of bird cages.
  - e. Feed only foods approved for consumption by the specific avian species or foods approved by a licensed veterinarian.
  - f. If water is spilled on the bottom of the cage, the paper should be changed and the cage bottom should be dried.
  - g. Procedures for sand and water bath for bird bathing.
  - h. If birds get out of the cage, the most effective way to catch an "escaped bird" is to use a towel to cover and trap the bird. It tends to be less stressful for the bird and facilitates control of the bird.
  - i. Any incident of injury to or from a bird should be reported to the person responsible for the facility pet program.
  - j. Always spray sink with disinfectant following cage cleaning procedures.
  - k. Always wipe up water and or seed following feeding and cleaning procedures.
  - l. Plants should never be placed near bird cages since many house plants are toxic.
  - m. Bird food should be stored in sealed containers such as glass jars, etc.
  - n. Birds must be kept in cages of sufficient size and overcrowding should be avoided.
6. All bird bites on employees or patients must be reported and attended to by the supervising physician or nurse for first aid and/or other medical attention as needed.
7. Daily Routine
  - a. All birds should receive fresh water and food daily.
  - b. Paper should be changed daily.

- c. Check for illness daily.
  - d. Isolate the sick bird, notify the veterinarian or administer appropriate medication as ordered.
  - e. Check and have birds nails clipped as needed.
  - f. Give vegetables and/or vitamin supplements or seed with vitamins and vegetables weekly or as recommended by the veterinarian.
  - g. Provide birds with a cuttle bone.
8. Weekly Routine
- a. All cages should be kept clean and in good repair. Strings or similar materials should not be used to fasten the door of the bird cage.
  - b. At a minimum of every seven days or more often if needed, the cages should be thoroughly cleaned as follows:
    - i. Bottom of cage scrubbed with hot water.
    - ii. Perches scraped and scrubbed
    - iii. Food and water containers scrubbed.
9. Bird Handlers: The facility should have several staff members assigned to feed and care for the birds, including cleaning the cages. If residents participate, they should be supervised by facility staff.
10. New Birds: Any “new” birds should be isolated from the flock for a period of two weeks or a time frame recommended by the veterinarian.
11. Breeding Birds
- a. Any breeding birds should also be monitored.
  - b. Brothers and sisters should be separated so they don’t breed.
  - c. Follow veterinarian’s recommendations on age to breed birds.

**GUIDELINES FOR LAGOMORPHS (RABBITS, HARES, CHINCHILLAS), AND RODENTS AS PETS IN NURSING HOMES**

- D. The following special guidelines apply to lagomorphs and rodents only:
- 1. Nursing facilities should have a signed certificate from a veterinarian certifying the animal(s) is/are free from disease. This examination should be completed prior to acceptance of the animal’s admission to the facility.
  - 2. Animals should be re-examined by a licensed veterinarian and a health certificate issued annually.
  - 3. The facility should have the animals examined whenever their health is in question.
  - 4. The facility should retain all health certificates and an individual animal’s illness and treatment record.

5. Wild lagomorphs and rodents should never be utilized as nursing home pets or therapy animals. Animals should be of a domesticated variety and originate from sources that customarily provide such varieties of animals (e.g. pet shops, breeders).
6. The only acceptable rodent species are mice, rats, hamsters, guinea pigs, or gerbils.
7. Several species of rodents are capable of transmitting diseases such as salmonellosis and lymphocytic choriomeningitis. Although the risk of transmission is relatively low, all rodents should be considered capable of transmitting disease, therefore the following precautions are recommended when handling any rodent.
  - a. Wash hands with soap and water (or alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap is unavailable and hands are not visibly soiled) after handling pet rodents or cleaning up pet droppings, cages, or areas where pets have been.
  - b. Keep rodent cages clean and free of soiled bedding.
  - c. Clean cages outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.
  - d. Closely supervise patients when handling rodents and supervise or assist patients in washing their hands immediately after handling rodents and rodent cages or bedding.
  - e. Never kiss or hold pet rodents close to the face.
  - f. Never allow pet rodents to come into contact with wild rodents or their droppings or nests. Cover pet rodent cages and food supplies and always supervise pet rodents when they are not in their cages.
  - g. Pregnant women should never handle rodents, clean rodent cages or care for rodents. Pregnant women should avoid prolonged stays in any room where a rodent resides.
  - h. Persons with impaired immune-system function should avoid contact with all rodents.
8. The facility should have written policies/procedures governing the care and feeding of the animals and a monitoring system to ensure the policies/procedures are carried out. At a minimum these policies should contain the following:
  - a. A responsible person shall ensure that the animal is kept in a habitat that:
    - i. has water free of algae, insects, and particulate matter
    - ii. is maintained to avoid odors from rotting food or excess animal wastes
    - iii. is not in the same room as food preparation areas or medical treatment areas.
  - b. The animal can only be removed from the habitat by persons identified by the nursing facility staff to be capable of handling the animals safely, minimizing risk of injury to both the handler and the animal.
  - c. When out of the animal's habitat, the animal must be under the control of the handler and should never be able to run free.
  - d. A responsible person shall ensure that the room in which an animal in a nursing home is kept:
    - i. is free of animal waste, except in the habitat

- ii. has a lavatory with soap and single-use paper towels or air hand dryers, or a product to sanitize the hands of an individual who touches an animal or its habitat.
  - e. Claws of lagomorphs should be trimmed as needed to prevent accidental infliction of scratch wounds.
  - f. Any incident of injury to or from a lagomorph or rodent should be reported to the person responsible for the facility pet program.
  - g. Animal food should be stored in sealed containers such as glass jars, etc.
  - h. Feed only foods approved for consumption by the specific species or foods approved by a licensed veterinarian.
5. All animal bites or scratches on employees or patients must be reported and attended to by the supervising physician or nurse for first aid and/or other medical attention as needed.
6. Daily Routine:
- a. All animals should receive fresh water and food daily.
  - b. Litter should be monitored daily and changed at an appropriate interval to maintain a clean and dry substrate.
  - c. Check for illness daily.
  - d. Isolate sick animals, notify the veterinarian or administer appropriate medication as ordered.
7. Weekly Routine
- a. All cages should be kept clean and in good repair.
  - b. At a minimum of every seven days or more often if needed, the cages should be thoroughly cleaned as follows:
    - i. bottom of cage scrubbed with hot water.
    - ii. food and water dishes scrubbed.
8. Animal Handlers: The facility should have several staff members assigned to feed and care for the animals, including cleaning the cages. If residents participate, they should be supervised by facility staff.
9. New lagomorphs or rodents: Any “new” animals should be isolated from existing stock for a period of two weeks or a time frame recommended by the veterinarian.

## **INFECTION CONTROL PROCEDURES FOR PET THERAPY PROGRAMS**

### **E. General infection control for pet therapy programs:**

1. All appropriate infection control procedures must be utilized. Written policies must be developed including strict hand washing guidelines.

2. The animals should not visit approved patients in direct patient care areas due to problems that may occur with other patients in the same room, i.e., allergy to cat or dog hair, treatments such as dressing changes being performed on neighboring patients, etc. Animals should visit with patients in a common room or in an outdoor area designated for this purpose.
3. The designated service elevators utilized for the transport of the animal to patient areas should be empty at the time of transport. Examples: food should not be on the same elevator at the time of transport.
4. Each operator of a pet therapy program would have individual Office of Public Health approval in order to assure compliance with the sanitarian's regulations.
5. Since pet therapy is a relatively new concept associated with long term patient care activities, the Office of Public Health reserves the right to place any additional requirements that may arise from such a program that is deemed necessary.
6. Any facility that allows a resident's house-hold pet(s) to visit in the facility must abide by these same guidelines and procedures.