

Therapaws

Pet Therapy Program
Expands to Provide
Emotional and Spiritual
Support to Patients

Some AMITA Health patients are about to greet some new visitors — the four-legged variety.

The pet therapy program, in partnership with Hinsdale Humane Society, has expanded to include visits to AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center Bolingbrook and AMITA Health Adventist St. Thomas Hospice. The “Therapaws” teams have been visiting AMITA Health Adventist Medical Centers Hinsdale and La Grange since 2015.

“There are so many benefits to pet therapy, including the improvement of motor skills and joint movement, increasing self-esteem and motivation, reducing anxiety and promoting feelings of spiritual fulfillment, to name just a few,” said Deborah Kraus, pet therapy team coordinator, Hinsdale Humane Society.

Currently, more than 40 dogs, three cats and one guinea pig participate in the program. In 2011, its CARE (Canine-Assisted Rehabilitation) program was introduced in partnership with AMITA Health. Trained owners and registered therapy pets visit the Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation Center Hinsdale to support children with their rehabilitation. The therapy pets help these young patients work on sensory issues, motor skills, eye contact and speech therapy.

Debbie Plica, volunteer coordinator at AMITA Health Hinsdale, oversees the program at the medical center. Pet therapy volunteers make visits to Labor and Delivery, Behavioral Health, Post-Surgical, Physical Rehabilitation and Pediatrics.

“Patients bond with the animals and some even ask if the animal can come back,” said Plica. “The Hinsdale Humane Society always works hard to fulfill those requests.

“Dogs are very intuitive. Recently we had a dog in the Labor and Delivery unit visit a woman who had been with us for months. The dog jumped right on her bed and laid his head on her belly,” she said. “The guinea pig and rabbit were very successful on the Behavioral Health units. Patients liked holding them in their hands.”

The therapy pets also extend comfort to families facing difficult medical procedures or illnesses and provide emotional support for hospital staff as well.

“We are so excited about our partnership with AMITA Health and our program’s recent expansion. There is a certain type of compassion that only a four-legged friend can provide,” said Kraus. “Pet therapy offers an immeasurable service and the Therapaws volunteers and their pets deliver a special kind of healing.”



Hinsdale Humane Society therapy pets Bosco and Lily with Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation Center therapists at an ice cream social at AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center Hinsdale.