

Sherman Hospital Animal-Assisted Therapy Program

General Information

(rev. 1/3/07)

Dear Pet Owner:

Thank you for your interest in the Sherman Hospital Animal-Assisted Therapy Program. Please review the enclosed materials and let us know if you have any questions. We have found that our requirements can appear more stringent than other programs, largely do to the fact that we are visiting ill patients in the hospital. As you consider becoming a volunteer, please consider carefully the veterinary vaccination requirements to make sure this is the right program for you.

Here are the key requirements of our program:

- ✓ Obtain certification as a Therapy Team through Therapy Dogs, Incorporated.
- ✓ Be willing to have your pet vaccinated for all the health requirements of the program
- ✓ Be willing to participate in the Sherman Hospital dog temperament screening/obedience testing process.
- ✓ Commit to a hospital visit schedule of a minimum of 2 times each month
- ✓ Be willing to follow all the rules of the program and attend all required training.

What is the Sherman Hospital AAT Program?

“Animal-Assisted” therapy programs in acute care hospital settings take many forms. The Sherman Hospital Program is limited to carefully selected dogs and handlers who have been trained to visit with patients. The aim of our program is to offer joy, comfort and companionship to patients through interacting with AAT dog/handler teams. You may find that our program has some requirements that exceed those required by other facilities you visit. As a hospital that cares for very sick patients, Sherman strives to ensure that the program’s health, safety and training requirements promote the well being of patients as well as handler teams.

To this end, all Sherman Hospital AAT teams must be “certified” for volunteer animal assisted activities by Therapy Dogs, Incorporated (TD Inc.), a highly regarded non-profit organization dedicated to providing registration, support and insurance to those volunteering in pet therapy activities. We also require successful completion of Sherman Hospital’s AAT pet temperament testing and visitation training workshop. We are very pleased to have Mary Mazzeri, a professional dog trainer and owner of Care Dog Training in Dundee, IL, serving as a volunteer advisor to our program. Mrs. Mazzeri and her colleague, professional dog trainer Carol Ronan, will be helping with temperament testing of dogs applying for participation in our program.

What is animal therapy “certification” and how does it work?

Please visit Therapy Dogs, Incorporated on the Internet, <http://www.therapydogs.com> to learn more about the organization’s certification process and requirements. If you prefer, you may phone them at 1-877-843-7364 for information.

We enthusiastically welcome inquiries about our program from teams *who have already* obtained Certification by TD Inc. We also encourage inquiries from handlers interested in obtaining TD Inc. Certification and will do our best to put you in touch with a local TD Inc. volunteer Tester/Observer (T/O). In the near future, we hope to offer TD Inc. Certification on-site at Sherman Hospital. Please understand that possession of TD Inc. certification does not automatically qualify a team to join the Sherman Hospital program.

While there are several other reputable pet therapy certification organizations, including Therapy Dogs International and the Delta Society, our program wishes to work with TD Inc. certified teams due to the organization’s rigorous screening requirements. For those certified by other organizations, we thank you for your understanding and encourage you to obtain TD Inc. credentials as well.

How do I begin the application process for the AAT program?

To be considered for the program, all prospective teams must obtain their TD Inc. Certification and complete the Sherman Hospital AAT Program Application. After submitting the application, you will have a brief telephone conversation about the program with one of our volunteers. Interested persons who meet the eligibility requirements will be invited to a Sherman Hospital AAT pet temperament screening. Teams who are selected for the program will be invited to a visitation-training workshop. In addition, handlers must comply with all requirements of the Sherman Hospital Volunteer Training Program, including a brief orientation, drug and TB screening, and a criminal background check. Those signing on as teams must be willing to comply with all the health and policy requirements of the program before beginning their visits.

As an AAT team, what would I be doing?

The Sherman Hospital Volunteer Office pre-schedules and coordinates pet/handler team visits on participating hospital floors. Visits with patients follow specific routines and last between 5 and 15 minutes. Handlers might be at the hospital for about one hour conducting visits. Of course, this would depend on your pet’s comfort and willingness to handle the demands of pet therapy on a given day. The training provided by the program during the application process should prepare handlers for visiting. Plus, for the first few visits, our program will provide handlers with an “AAT Escort” to help with any questions about the program.

The AAT team’s role is to interact with patients about the therapy dog and offer the patient an opportunity to pet and interact with the animal. Our program will provide each team with “trading cards” with their pet’s name and picture describing the dog’s special personality and breed traits as a token of the visit. All teams are required to complete brief record keeping forms to document their visits.

Who can become an AAT team?

We are seeking handlers who have the following characteristics:

- Minimum of 18 years old
- Caring individual with good communication skills
- Dependable, prompt and conscientious
- Good personal hygiene
- Be physically able to repeatedly kneel, bend, assist mid-sized dogs for bed presentation (lifting or supporting front end), or lift smaller dogs for bed presentations.
- Ability to pass TB/drug screening and criminal background check
- Attend program screening and training and annual RENEW training
- Willingness to sign in and out to record volunteer hours

Dogs should have the following qualifications and characteristics:

- Dogs must be 1 year of age or older
- Proficient in basic and off-leash obedience (e.g. sit on command, down on command, stay and recall on command, walk loosely on a leash without pulling, able to perform these commands without treats.) **No pronged collars, gentle leader leashes or retractable leashes, please. Slip collars are acceptable.**
- No history of human or dog aggression
- Dogs will have lived with the handler for at least 6 months
- Confident and outgoing
- Loves people and other dogs
- Likes to be petted and touched
- Tolerant
- Predictable
- Good temperament
- Controllable
- Handle stress well
- Well-mannered

What are the health requirements for the pet and handler?

Handlers are responsible for complying with following health requirements for their participating dogs and themselves. *Since the list may contain pet vaccinations you may not currently choose for your pet, **please** wait until your pet has been approved for participation in the program before obtaining any additional shots.*

Pet:

Your veterinarian must complete the AAT Program's **Veterinary Screening Form** within 45 days of the form's submission. It includes the following information:

- Verification of current inoculations for: Rabies (1 or 3 years), DHPP (Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvovirus, Par influenza), and Bordetella
- Results of annual heartworm test
- Verification of good dental health
- Verification of no allergies
- Verification of no hypothyroidism
- Verification of negative stool exam for parasites
- Verification of a healthy and clean appearance; no signs of fleas, ticks, or dermatitis
- Verification of flea protection

The AAT Program will arrange the following screenings through the Sherman Hospital Laboratory at no cost to you:

- Stool specimen and annual throat cultures for the following:
 - Giardia*
 - Shigella*
 - Campylobacter*
 - Group A Strep throat culture*

Handler:

- Pass TB/drug screening and criminal background check arranged at no cost to you by the Sherman Hospital Volunteer Office.

How do I get started?

If this program sounds like it might be right for you and your pet, please call the Sherman Hospital Volunteer Office at 1-847-429-8720 to receive an application. We would also be happy to answer your questions about the program.