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| SUBJECT: PET THERAPY | Astera Health |
| DEPARTMENT: Volunteers | |
| APPROVED BY: Administration | EFFECTIVE: 09/2025 REVISED: |

SCOPE:

To outline procedures and guidelines for the implementation and administration of the Pet Therapy Program at Astera Health, using Pet Partners as the certifying body. The program aims to improve patient and staff well-being and emotional health through safe and structured therapy animal visits.

POLICY:

1. Certification Requirements

Astera Health will require all volunteer handler-animal teams to be certified through [Pet Partners](#). All handlers must:

- o Complete the Pet Partners Handler Training Course.
- o Pass a team evaluation.
- o Maintain good standing with Pet Partners through re-certification every two years.
- o Submit documentation to Volunteer Services prior to participation via the [Volunteer Application Form](#).

2. Therapy Animal Requirements

- o Dogs are the only species accepted.
- o Dogs must be at least one year old.
- o Must be well-groomed and clean before visits.
- o No raw meat diets allowed.
- o Up-to-date vaccinations and free from parasites or communicable diseases, annually.
- o Leashed at all times while in the facility.

3. Handler Responsibilities

- o Remain with their animal at all times.
- o Follow hospital confidentiality and code of conduct policies.
- o Report any incidents (bites, scratches, patient concerns) immediately to Volunteer Services and Infection Prevention.
- o Maintain hygiene protocols, including handwashing before and after visits.
- o Request verbal permission from all visitors, patients and staff prior to animal contact with them.
- o Wash hands if doing any other tasks after handling animal.

4. Scheduling and Visit Protocol

- o All visits must be coordinated by Volunteer Services.
- o Patient consent and nursing approval are required prior to visits.
- o Therapy animals are not permitted in rooms with isolation precautions, immunocompromised patients, or where animal contact is contraindicated.

- Visits are limited to two hours per team per day.
- 5. **Infection Prevention and Safety**
 - The program will adhere to CDC and Pet Partners infection control standards.
 - Staff will receive orientation on risks and mitigation practices.
 - Therapy animals must not enter sterile or surgical environments.
 - Patients must wash hands after contact with therapy dog.
- 6. **Documentation and Oversight**
 - Volunteer Services will maintain handler credentials, visit logs, and annual compliance records.
 - Incidents will be logged and reviewed by Infection Prevention and Risk Management.
- 7. **Training and Education**
 - Volunteer Services will provide Pet Therapy orientation to departments.
 - Handlers will receive ongoing updates as needed regarding policy changes.
- 8. **Evaluation and Review**
 - Annual review of program outcomes, including patient and staff feedback.
 - Adjustments will be made based on evidence-based best practices and updates from Pet Partners.

References:

- Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program Requirements:
<https://petpartners.org/volunteer/requirements/>
- CDC Guidelines for Animals in Healthcare Facilities
- AAHA Guidelines for Working, Assistance, and Therapy Dogs
- Animals in the Healthcare Setting – Astera Health Policy