

1.0 Background

The presence of visiting animals can improve the wellbeing of patients and reduce stress and anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and relaxing.

This procedure applies to the use of dogs in Pet Therapy across NHS Lothian and applies to all staff within NHS Lothian who may be involved with organising Pet Therapy and working with the Volunteers (dog owners) organised through Canine Concern Scotland Trust. All Pet Therapy visits will be carried out through Canine Concern Scotland's Therapet® Service and are free of charge.

It is well documented that disease can be acquired from a variety of normal domestic pets, however, providing reasonable care is taken, the psychological and physical benefits of having a pet dog, in most circumstances, outweigh the risk of infection.

Nevertheless, for many immuno-compromised patients or for patients receiving immunosuppressive therapy the risk from exposure to the micro flora of pets may outweigh the benefits of the contact and this must be given careful consideration.

Contact of patients with a Therapet® Dog should be approved on a patient-by-patient basis and this procedure should be read and implemented in conjunction with the [“Animals in Care Settings: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines”](#).

1.1 Introduction

Domesticated animals have been used as an adjunct in the treatment of illness for over a hundred years. There is now a variety of scientific research to prove the ever-increasing health benefits of pet ownership and especially the value of pet therapy. “In general, people who interact with animals may benefit from improved physical, psychological and social health” (Brodie & Biley, 1999).

Pet Therapy is gradually becoming widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication and can provide patients with an enjoyable distraction and a method of relaxation. Some animals (pets) are now, as a result, being used more regularly for therapeutic reason in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices.

In 2005 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was set up between NHS Lothian and the charity Canine Concern Scotland Trust for the delivery of a dog focused Therapet® service across NHS Lothian sites. Annual due diligence checks are carried out by NHS Lothian's Voluntary Services Team and the SLA is reviewed and re-issued every three years. Canine Concern Scotland Trust's Therapet® Dogs are the **only animals** permitted to visit NHS Lothian premises (excluding assistance dogs and with appropriate agreement, patient's own pets).

Animals **not suitable** for care settings and thus **must not** be introduced at any time include:

- Exotic animals e.g., reptiles, snakes or fish that require specialist facilities or foods which could introduce infections
- Birds and rodents
- Ruminant animals such as ponies, reindeer, llamas etc. in acute healthcare
- and feral animals (nor should they be actively fed on healthcare premises).

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The presence of visiting animals can improve the wellbeing of patients and reduce stress and anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and relaxing. The role of Pet Therapy in appropriate patients is:

- To raise a patient's physical and mental health by creating a more informal environment.
- To help a patient feel less lonely by sharing their thoughts, fears and feelings with the animal.
- To benefit all senses especially touch.
- To provide a distraction for the patient.
- To provide a method of relaxation whilst in hospital.
- To provide a welcome change from routine.
- To simulate a link with home and with others in the clinical setting.

This procedure acknowledges the role of Canine Concern Scotland's Therapet® Service and defines NHS Lothian employee and patient responsibilities within these.

1.3 Scope

This procedure applies to all staff within NHS Lothian who may be involved with Pet Therapy and the Volunteers (dog owners) organised through the Canine Concern Scotland Trust.

The only animal approved to provide Pet Therapy on NHS Lothian sites

All Canine Concern Scotland's Therapet® visits must be co-ordinated by NHS Lothian's Voluntary Services Team. Visits are free of charge and will be carried out with prior agreement by a trained Therapet® Volunteer from Canine Concern Scotland Trust. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate to take the patient to see the dog outside of the clinical area and this should be considered wherever possible.

In exceptional circumstances, e.g., end of life care, and with agreement of the Nurse in Charge, family dogs may visit. A risk assessment should be carried out to assess the suitability of this activity taking place. This procedure does not refer to professionally trained assistance dogs.

This procedure should be read and implemented in conjunction with the “[Animals in Care Settings: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines](#)”

1.4 General Guidance for Introducing Pet Therapy

In line with NHS Lothian Volunteering Policy and Procedures, a robust Service Level Agreement is in place for Canine Concern Scotland Trust and annual due diligence checks are carried out by the Voluntary Services Team to ensure the safety of all involved in the delivery of the Therapet® Service across NHS Lothian.

1.4.1 In preparation for a visit

Approval for the introduction of Therapet® Dog visits to a ward or department must be done in conjunction with the Clinical Nurse Manager, the infection prevention and control team and the Voluntary Services team. A step-by-step process for arranging a visit can be found in Appendix 1 and a request form can be found in Appendix 3.

Clinical staff in an area or department will decide whether a visit from a dog would be of benefit to the patient(s). Short stay wards where patient turnover is high should consider whether there is likely to be sufficient patient benefit to justify a visit. Staff will give consideration and ensure that any visit does not result in harm or disruption to other patients.

Patients must have been deemed medically fit to be interact with the Therapet® visits. Contact between the person receiving care and the animal must not be allowed if either is displaying symptoms of sickness and/or diarrhoea. Any person receiving care who has wound sites and/or invasive lines should not be visited by the Therapet® Dog. Patients or staff with known allergies or who are immunocompromised or undergoing immunosuppression treatments should not have contact with the Therapet® Dog.

Patient Consent and visit Checklists (Appendix 2) must be sought and completed before any visit takes place. This is essential in ensuring that only appropriate patients are visited. Checklists will capture patient wishes, phobias, allergies, risk, infection control issues, immunosuppression and patient invasive devices/wounds. Visits will be withdrawn if the appropriate checklists are not completed for every visit. It is the responsibility of the ward/department to ensure this is completed prior to every visit. Checklists will be provided by the Voluntary Services Team.

It is recommended that each session should last no longer than 60 – 90 minutes.

1.4.2 Canine Concern Scotland Trust will ensure:

- Each dog has an up-to-date certificate of immunisation from a licensed veterinarian
- Each dog has passed a health check and has been assessed for general suitability for the role
- All Canine Concern Scotland volunteers have Disclosure Scotland Police Check and/or PVG Scheme Membership and adhere to the NHS Lothian Volunteering Policy
- Public Liability Insurance is maintained as set out in their SLA
- On the day of each visit the volunteer will re-affirm both their health and the health and suitability of the dog to attend
- The Volunteer is aware that it is their responsibility to clean up any soiling from the dog during the course of the visit
- All Canine Concern Scotland Volunteers will carry a Canine Concern ID badge and lanyard, their dog will also have a visible yellow lead flash as shown below identifying them as a Therapet®.

1.4.3 General Advice

There should always be a designated person assigned to all Therapet® visits, this can be a member of staff or if agreed with the Voluntary Services team, an NHS Lothian volunteer can be recruited and trained for this role. This member of staff or volunteer should ensure hand hygiene of all parties before and after touching the dog and ensure that only patients who have given consent are visited. Patients must be given the opportunity to say no to a visit. Visits will not be started until this is in place and can be stopped at any time if this is not implemented.

No Canine Concern Scotland volunteer should visit patients on their own and they must supervise their dog at all times.

Hard surface areas where the dog has been, must be cleaned up after the visit and the Therapet® dog **must not** be placed on patient beds.

Food must be moved out of the way of the visiting animal e.g., by pushing patient tables out of the immediate vicinity of the animal. Only dog treats supplied by the owner should be given and explicit consent must be gained from the owner before doing so. No other food items should be given to the dog. Sessions **must not** take place whilst food is being served or eaten.

Any incidents or accidents should be recorded on DATIX by the member of staff overseeing the visit, if this is being overseen by a volunteer, the Nurse in Charge must be alerted.

1.4.4 Infection Prevention and Control

An Infection Control Nurse may be consulted on any issues regarding hygiene or other concerns which relate to the Therapet® Service.

Infection Prevention & Control based enquires:

Infection Prevention & Control Duty Nurse is available Monday-Friday, 9am – 4pm for staff or others to seek additional or more specialised guidance that they have been unable to source in the manual or from this procedure. Telephone: 0131 536 3373 (extension 63373) Email: InfectionControl@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

1.5 Named Contacts and Responsibilities

The Voluntary Services Team are responsible for maintaining the SLA in place with Canine Concern Scotland Trust and for arranging all Therapet® Visits across NHS Lothian sites.

The Voluntary Services Team maintain an up-to-date live record of all planned Therapet® visits across all acute and community hospital sites.

Staff should not contact Canine Concern Scotland Directly unless they are arranging visits for patients in the community.

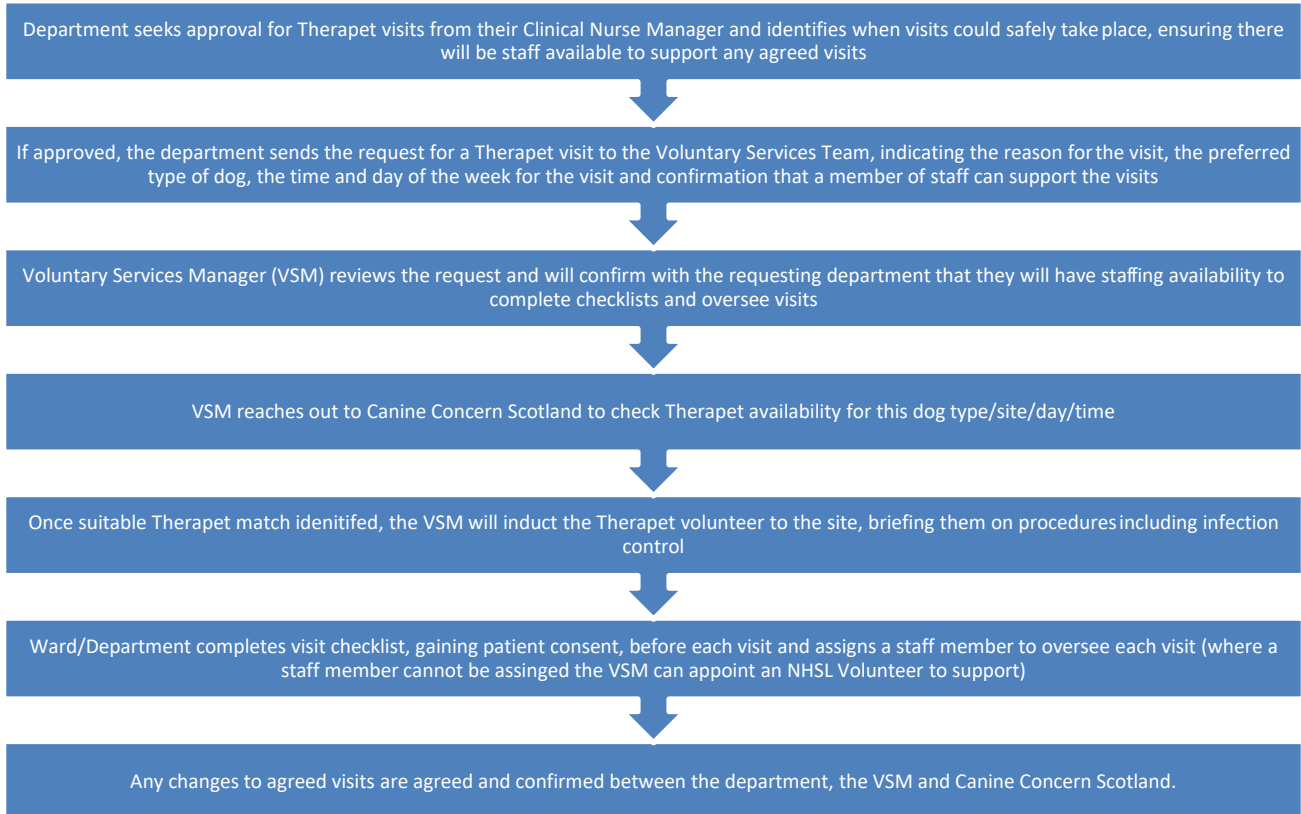
Key contact information for the Voluntary Services team can be found here:

<http://intranet.lothian.scot.nhs.uk/Directory/InvolvingPeople/Volunteering/Pages/Contacts.aspx>

Involving Animals in NHS Lothian - Procedure



Appendix 1 Requesting a Therapet® Visit – Flow Diagram



Appendix 2

Checklist for Animal Assisted Activities

To be used in conjunction with *Animals in Care Settings: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines* Published by Health Protection Scotland

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/animals-in-care-settings-infection-prevention-and-control-guidelines>

TO BE COMPLETED BY THERAPET® COORDINATOR/VOLUNTEER

If your response is no to any of these questions, the visit must not go ahead.

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Is the animal registered with Canine Concern Scotland Therapet® Scheme? | YES | NO |
| The vaccination record, and parasite prevention record for the dog are up-to-date. | YES | NO |
| That the dog has not been fed on raw food. | YES | NO |
| For all visits, please confirm the following statements: | | |
| The owner/handler has undergone criminal records checks & PVG checks? | YES | NO |
| The owner/handler carries an identification card? | YES | NO |
| The owner/handler and animal have had no vomiting or diarrhoea in the last 48 hours? | YES | NO |
| That owner/handler and animal have had no cough or cold in the last 24 hours? | YES | NO |

PRINT Name:

Volunteer Title:

Sign:

Date:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE WARD/DEPARTMENT HOSTING THE VISIT

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Permission has been granted by patients/parents to allow the animal to visit? (If no, the visit must not go ahead) | YES | NO |
| Have you checked if there are any patients/staff in the areas where the visit is due to take place who have a phobia or allergy to the animal? (Those with a phobia or allergy must not be visited) | YES | NO |
| Are there any immune-suppressed or otherwise vulnerable patients in the area where the visit is due to take place? (If yes, the visit must not go ahead in these areas) | YES | NO |
| Has a risk assessment been completed with mitigations in place and the Infection Prevention and Control Team have been consulted where necessary? | YES | NO |
| Is the ward currently under observation or closed due to suspected or confirmed outbreak? (If yes, the visit should not go ahead). | YES | NO |
| Records are kept of who is visited and when and where? (Details are provided below) | YES | NO |
| Record Location: | | |

PRINT Name:**Job Title:****Sign:****Work base:****Date:**

Appendix 3

Therapet® Visit Request Form (to be completed by the requesting ward/department):

Completed request forms should be sent to Loth.VolunteerEnquiries@nhs.scot.

| | |
|---|---|
| Requested by: | e.g., Jane Smith, SCN, Ward 104, Royal Infirmary |
| Date of request: | e.g., 3 June 2024 |
| Proposed Visit Location: | e.g., Ward 104 |
| Preferred day for the visit: | e.g., Monday |
| Preferred time for the visit: | E.g., 2pm |
| Reason for request: | e.g., Improve patient wellbeing |
| Have patients be consulted about this request? If yes, how? If no, why not? | e.g., Yes, 20 patients consulted over 4 week period leading up to request. |
| Anticipated patient outcomes: | e.g., improved mood, reduced isolation |
| Number of patients who will benefit: | e.g., approx. 8-12 per visit |
| Member of staff who will be responsible for the visits and complete visit checklists: | e.g., Jane Smith, SCN |
| Type of dog requested (e.g., small, short haired, hypoallergenic etc): | e.g., small to medium sized dog, minimal shedding |
| Who has approved this request? | e.g., CNM – Joe Bloggs |