

Status **Active** PolicyStat ID **8363833**



Origination 08/2017  
Last Approved 08/2020  
Effective 08/2020  
Last Revised 08/2020  
Next Review 08/2023

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Policy Area Patient Care  
Applicability UNC Medical Center

## Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)

### I. Description

Requirements and procedures for using animals in activities and therapy. NOTE: This policy does not apply to service animals, which are dogs or miniature horses trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. For information about service animals, see UNC Medical Center (UNCMC) Policy, "[Service Animals](#)."

### II. Rationale

The purpose of Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) is to provide patients, family members and staff at UNC Health (UNCH) the opportunity to interact with animals, and in so doing, reduce stress, including the stress associated with hospitalization. The animal/human bond may be utilized to achieve functional outcomes, reminisce, socialize, and learn about pet care.

AAA provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. AAA are delivered by specially-trained professionals, para-professionals, and/or registered Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International, Dogs with a Purpose, Love on a Leash or Alliance of Therapy Dogs teams, in association with animals that meet specific criteria.

### III. Policy

#### A. The AAA Program

The coordination of the AAA program shall be the responsibility of the Department of Volunteer Services.

The following are requirements of clinical areas that desire to participate in the AAA program:

1. Each new clinical area must be approved by the Nurse Manager of the unit requesting the program and the Director of Volunteer Services.
2. A staff member must be available for consultations or emergencies.

## B. Permissible Visitation Animals

Currently, only domesticated dogs may participate in the AAA program.

## C. Requirements for AAA Teams

1. AAA teams must be registered with one of the following organizations: Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International, Dogs with a Purpose, Love on a Leash or Alliance of Therapy Dogs. The UNCMC Volunteer Services staff will screen potential AAA volunteers and their dogs. In addition, each AAA volunteer handler must complete UNCMC volunteer training and become an approved UNCMC Volunteer. Volunteer Services will provide orientation for the AAA teams, will verify therapy dog credentials, and will ensure completion of all initial and ongoing requirements for volunteers.
2. After becoming registered UNCMC Volunteers, the volunteer and dog will be mentored by a current AAA team. Volunteers will visit patients and visitors. All animals must satisfactorily complete Volunteer Services therapy dog orientation and annual veterinary medical screening, as specified in this policy.
3. AAA teams are not allowed within UNCH unless they are registered UNCMC Volunteers and therapy dog volunteers, in accordance with this policy.
4. If an AAA team handler is a UNCMC employee, that AAA team may NOT visit patients on the unit on which the employee works.
5. AAA teams will carry hand sanitizer so that visitors, staff and patients wishing to pet the dogs sanitize their hands before and after visits.
6. AAA team visits are restricted to an approximately 90 minute session, excluding a break, to reduce animal fatigue (at discretion of the handler). The handler is responsible for determining when his/her dog needs a break. AAA team visits should not exceed a 120 minute session.
7. Medical Screening of Animals
  - a. The AAA dog owner's licensed veterinarian must complete a AAA Veterinary Health Form (Medical Screening) for the visiting animal. A new AAA Veterinary Health Form is required annually.
  - b. Routine screening for specific, potentially zoonotic microorganisms, including group A streptococci, *Clostridium difficile*, VRE, and MRSA is not recommended. If screening is required for special circumstances noted in the APIC (Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology) article "Guidelines For Animal-assisted Interventions in Health Care Facilities," the Associate Director from UNCMC Infection Prevention will assist with interpretation of lab results. If the lab results contraindicate visitation, UNCMC Infection Prevention will notify Volunteer Services.
  - c. In areas, or situations that pose a potential risk of exposure, a dog may be

required to go to a veterinarian for special testing to maintain the safety of the animal and/or UNCH patients. When this is deemed necessary by UNCMC Infection Prevention, UNCMC will be responsible for the cost of testing.

- d. Prior to each visit, handlers will complete the AAA Health Checklist and will leave it with Volunteer Services.
- e. Volunteer Services will maintain records of AAA Veterinary Health Forms, AAA Health Checklists and inpatient visitation records of each AAA team.

Medical Screening Requirements (AAA Veterinary Health Form and AAA Health Checklist):

- Proof of up-to-date vaccinations (distemper, parainfluenza, parvovirus, and rabies)
- Receiving routine medication for the prevention of heartworm
- Receiving routine flea and tick prevention OR receipt of a Capstar® 24 hours prior to the visit
- Dogs should not enter the hospital starting from the onset of and until at least 1 week beyond the resolution of:
  - Episodes of vomiting or diarrhea
  - Urinary or fecal incontinence
  - Episodes of sneezing or coughing of unknown or suspected infectious origin
  - Treatment with non-topical antimicrobial or with any immunosuppressive doses of medication
  - Open wounds
  - Ear infections
  - Skin infections or "hot spots" (acute moist dermatitis)
  - Orthopedic or other conditions that, in the opinion of the animal's vet, could result in pain or distress to the animal during handling and/or when maneuvering within the facility
  - Demonstrating signs of heat

8. Other requirements for the dogs while visiting UNCH facilities:

- a. They must not be soiled or malodorous. Dogs must be clean and brushed. Nails must be short with no sharp edges.
- b. They must wear a UNCMC ID badge and Tar Heal Paws bandana. If unable to wear the badge, the handler must have the badge on their person.
- c. They must be under direct supervision of their handler at all times, to include being on a leash no longer than 6 feet that is not a flexi-leash. If part of the

visit is to include letting a patient walk the dog, two leashes will be required, so the handler maintains control.

- d. They must not have been fed raw meat within 90 days of the visit.
  - e. Owners must make a visual assessment for fleas and ticks.
  - f. Collar, leash and any apparel worn must be clean.
9. Volunteer Services will notify the AAA team when the veterinary visit is due. UNCMC also requires reevaluation of dogs every two years through the team's registering therapy organization. This is to ensure that all AAA teams have up to date credentials and health screening when visiting UNCMC.
10. Visitation Routes/Escorts
- a. The AAA team will be allowed to enter UNCH through any public access point. Upon entering UNCH, the team must follow the approved process for visitation.
  - b. For health and safety reasons, the team may not enter any food venue.
  - c. The AAA team may walk in the hallways and ride the elevators without special precautions. Prior to getting on the elevator, the handler should check if other travelers are okay riding with an AAA team.
  - d. Once the AAA team has completed orientation requirements, they may conduct visits without direct staff supervision or their assigned mentor. In order to conduct unescorted visits as stated above, the AAA team must have successfully completed visits as determined by both Volunteer Services and the mentoring team. Exception: For Psychiatry Units and Intensive Care Units (ICU), the pet team must have a staff member or volunteer liaison present during the visit.
  - e. Some teams may choose to work with a trained Volunteer Liaison or staff member who may assist them with paperwork, make sure that hands are sanitized and help determine which patients to visit. Their mentor may determine that it is best for the AAA team to work with a Liaison. Volunteer Liaisons also go through a mentoring process prior to working with an AAA team.
  - f. The AAA team may visit staff and visitors in the lobby areas of the Hospitals.
  - g. The AAA team may visit waiting areas including ICU and Surgical Waiting rooms. Teams must ask if anyone is allergic or fearful of their dog prior to visiting and make provisions to comply with these issues.
11. Physician Orders and Consent
- a. For patients who are neutropenic (ANC <1000), on Protective Precautions, in the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, or in an Intensive Care Unit, participation in the AAA program requires an order from the patient's attending physician or designee, indicating that a visit is allowed.
  - b. For patients that have a medical or behavioral condition or disorder that may make participation a concern, a licensed nurse or physician knowledgeable

about the patient's condition must have an informed consent discussion with the patient or the patient's authorized representative. The attending physician or designee must document the discussion in the patient's medical record and enter an order for AAA for the patient.

- c. For other inpatients, outpatients, or visitation in lobby areas or waiting rooms, no physician orders are required. Verbal consent is sought prior to any interaction between inpatients and outpatients in the clinic setting and the AAA team.

## 12. Exclusion Criteria

The following patients will be excluded from participation in the AAA program due to health and safety concerns:

- a. Patients with open sores on exposed area of skin
  - b. Patients exhibiting aggressive behavior
  - c. Patients with immunoglobulin deficiencies
  - d. Patients on any *Isolation Precautions* (Airborne, Droplet, Contact, Enteric, Protective)
  - e. Patient's on Protective Precautions or Neutropenic patients (ANC <1000) may participate with an order written by the patient's attending physician or designee
  - f. Patients with known allergies to visiting animals
13. For patients with other conditions that may result in immunosuppression (i.e., splenectomy, high dose steroids, organ transplant), it is recommended that the AAA team consult with the attending physician, or designee, to determine the appropriateness of participation.
14. Anyone participating in AAA must wash their hands or use a waterless hand wash (e.g., alcohol-based hand sanitizer) before and after petting/feeding the dog.
15. Patients may not eat or drink during AAA visits.
16. The AAA team will clean any visibly soiled surfaces that may have been contaminated during visitation sessions with the appropriate disinfectant/detergent (e.g., alcohol, sanitizing wipes) after the session.
17. Inpatient room visitation

When visiting inpatient rooms, the following procedure should occur:

- a. Volunteers should get a patient census and determine from staff who can and cannot receive an AAA visit.
- b. All patients who are visited are noted on the census and this paperwork is delivered to Volunteer Services at the end of the team's shift or provided by unit liaison.
- c. Patient's clothing should be covered (e.g., with a clean sheet, blanket or isolation gown).

- d. For patients who are unable to get out of bed, a clean sheet or blanket should be placed over the bedcovers prior to allowing the dog on the bed.
  - e. After the visit, the top cover should be carefully removed by rolling the sheet inward toward the center and then disposed of in the linen hamper.
  - f. For neutropenic patients (protective precautions) with an ANC <1000, the dog must remain on the floor and patient must wear a mask.
18. Feeding of treats to the AAA dog should be limited. However, if the act is believed to have a significant therapeutic benefit for the patient, then the handler is required to:
- a. Ensure the dog has been trained to take treats gently, instructing the patient to present the treat with a flattened palm.
  - b. Provide the patient with appropriate treats to give; avoiding unsterilized bones, rawhides, pig ears and other dehydrated and unsterilized foods or chews of animal origin.
  - c. Ensure that the patient practices hand hygiene before and after presenting the treat to the dog.

## IV. Related Policy

[Service Animals](#)

## V. Responsible for Content

Volunteer Services Director, Medical Director, Infection Prevention, Legal Department

### Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date
Policy Stat Administrator	Kimberly Novak-Jones: Nurse Educator	08/2020
AVP Operations	Meghan Mccann: VP Operations - UNCMC	08/2020
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