Highly Qualified

Tallahassee Memorial first introduced animal therapy to its patients and their families in 2005 under the auspices of Companions for Therapy (ComForT), Tallahassee’s first animal therapy program and one of the largest and most respected in the country. In 2011, ComForT transferred the program’s leadership to TMH, along with its rigorous training protocol and national certification standards.

The Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program teams are trained according to national standards and each team must pass a skills and aptitude test. The animal must also be examined by a veterinarian to ensure good health before engaging in the program. Certifications must be renewed every two years. Presently, the program has over 150 teams visiting 60 different facilities, in groups and as individual teams. Although dogs comprise the greater number of therapy animals, the program also includes cats, parrots, miniature horses and a horse.

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Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program

About Us
The Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program is a highly-visible and valuable community and regional asset that serves the spectrum of Leon County’s and the Big Bend’s populations. The program’s nationally-registered and trained animal therapy volunteer teams visit hospitals, hospices and centers for long-term care, assisted living, rehabilitation and adult day care. Public schools, libraries, bookstores and even courthouses also benefit from animal therapy visits.

The value of loving contact between humans and animals has been anecdotally recognized for centuries. Now, there is an emerging and ever-increasing body of scientific evidence that clearly identifies animals as natural therapists with the ability to improve physical and mental health, manage pain, offer motivation, encourage learning, build confidence and tear down barriers to success.

Therapy animals provide motivation and even pain management for patients experiencing difficulty with rehabilitation. According to Sherree Porter, M.S., CCC-SLP, Program Manager at the Tallahassee Memorial Rehabilitation Center, “The work the therapy animals do to assist in the therapeutic process of our patient population is exceptional. The TMH therapy staff considers the therapy dogs as teammates and extender therapists in the rehabilitation process.” Researchers at Tallahassee Memorial are working to create an objective format for evaluating the effectiveness of animals as therapeutic agents and quantitatively measuring patient outcomes. That work will lay the predicate for the development of a robust research agenda in the field of animal therapy that will stand side-by-side with animal therapy practice at TMH.

Want to Volunteer?
The Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program relies on outstanding volunteers – both animal and human. Although TMH has many animal therapy volunteers, more teams are needed to meet the compelling and ever-growing call for those facing educational, emotional, judicial, mental and/or physical challenges.

In order to volunteer, the animal must be at least one year old, well mannered, engaging, responsive to contact with strangers and familiar with basic obedience standards. The human team member, often identified as the handler, must be at least 14 years old, unless accompanied by an adult. Training, testing and registration are required to ensure safe and positive experiences for the animals, their handlers and the people they visit.

To learn how you and your animal can become volunteers, please visit TMH.ORG/AnimalTherapy.