Name of Policy: Animals on Hospital Premises Policy

Effective From: 15/11/2016

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<th>Date Ratified</th>
<th>21/09/2016</th>
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<td>Infection Prevention and Control Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review Date</td>
<td>01/09/2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Director of Nursing, Midwifery &amp; Quality/ Joint Director of Infection Prevention &amp; Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expiry Date</td>
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This policy supersedes all previous issues
## Version Control

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Introduction

Traditionally, the presence of animals in health care facilities has been discouraged on the basis of Control of Infection and Health and Safety issues.

Gateshead Health NHS Trust (GHNT) is committed to ensuring that its services and facilities are open and accessible to all. It takes its responsibilities under the Equalities Act (2010) seriously, and recognises that unnecessary restrictions of access to guide and assistance dogs and other animals could prevent some service users from having appropriate access to the hospital.

Although infections acquired from animals (zoonoses) are well described there is, however, very little evidence to suggest that this risk is significant in a controlled setting. Assistance dogs are used by people who have certain disabilities in order to retain a level of independence. These dogs have been thoroughly trained and assessed by specialist organisations to allow them to safely carry out their important role. In addition, employees with a disability rely on their service animal.

GHNT is required under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure every effort is made to accommodate people’s needs, as long as patient and staff safety is not put at unnecessary risk. The Trust allows service animals on its premises.

PAT (Pets-as-Therapy) dogs can provide valuable therapeutic assistance to patients, and provision for their access is also documented below.

There is also some scope for allowing patients’ pet dogs and other suitable species of pet to be brought into hospital buildings.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the Control of Infection parameters under which animals may be permitted on Trust premises.

Policy scope

This policy applies to all employees of GHFT, all students, visiting health professionals, locum and agency staff as well as patients and visitors.

Aim of policy

The aim of the policy is to provide specific guidance on what animals are allowed on hospital premises and when.

Duties (roles and responsibilities)

Trust Executive Board of Directors
The Board of Directors, through the Chief Executive and the Medical Director, will delegate to the Joint Directors of Infection Prevention and Control (DIPC) responsibility for supporting and encouraging compliance for this policy.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Trust has the necessary management systems in place to enable the effective implementation of this policy and overall responsibility for the health and safety of staff, patients and visitors.

Director of Infection Prevention and Control (DIPC)
The DIPC has executive responsibility for ensuring systems are in place to facilitate staff awareness of this Policy and is the owner of this policy.

**The Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT)**
The IPCT should provide any necessary advice on preventing the spread of infection through animal visits. The team has the responsibility to inform GHNT of any changes to infection control legislation which may affect this policy.

**Associate Directors/ Service Line Managers (AD & SLM)**
It is the responsibility of Business Unit Directors and SLMs to ensure that assistance dog users are made to feel welcome in their area and their access needs catered for. Should an assistance dog user be refused access to a ward or department, the Trust needs to do so on appropriate and reasonable grounds.

**Volunteer Co-ordinator**
All PAT visits should be arranged with the Trust Volunteer Co-ordinator and be coordinated in advance with relevant ward and departmental managers.

Copies of training and assessment certification and relevant insurance for PAT dogs will be kept on record by the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

**All healthcare Staff and Volunteers**
All staff and volunteers should be aware of this policy and understand their duty to make assistance dog users feel welcomed to the Trust.

5 Definitions

**Dogs**
The most common species of animal likely to be brought in to the hospital are dogs. Dogs are social creatures, evolved to be highly responsive to humans and thrive in human company. Extremely trainable, dogs perform a number of roles, including:

**Assistance Dog**
An Assistance Dog is one which has been specifically trained to assist a person with a specific disability and which has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK).

Assistance Dogs trained by members of Assistance Dogs (UK) have formal identification and are permitted to accompany their owners at all times and in all places within the United Kingdom.

Certification is granted by the Department of Health.

**Types of Assistance Dogs**
- **Guide Dogs** - assist people who are blind or are visually impaired.
- **Hearing Dogs** - assist people who are deaf or are hearing impaired.
- **Medical Detection and Seizure Alert Dogs** - are trained to behave differently when they detect a potential seizure, which may appear to be misbehaving. These dogs can detect odour changes that are associated with severe medical conditions and alert their owners when a seizure or incident is about to happen.

**Pets as Therapy (PAT) dogs**
These dogs are trained and assessed by Pets as Therapy (PAT) and are temperamentally suitable for visiting patients to provide some therapeutic assistance.

**Pet Dogs**
These dogs are owned by individuals and will have varying levels of training and a range of temperaments.

**Security Animals**
These are dogs that work for the Police and can include sniffer dogs and security dogs.

**Cats**
While there are some cats that have become qualified PAT cats, the nature and behaviour of the cat makes it an **unsuitable visitor in any capacity**.

Cats make great pets and can be highly affectionate and people-orientated. They are however, territorial rather than social creatures, and do not cope well being taken to new environments. Their instinct when stressed is primarily to take flight. Bringing a cat into the hospital risks causing it stress and risking its escape, and possible harm to itself and others. In the interests of their welfare, cats, whether PAT cats or pet cats, are not permitted into the hospital unless under exceptional circumstances. In such instances, the temperament of the cat and how it reacts to novel environments and travelling should be considered and should only be brought in a secure carrier. The cat should only be let out in a closed room with no possibility for escape should it panic.

**Other Mammals**
Generally speaking, most assistance animals will be dogs. While there are instances of other mammals, such as monkeys, goats, rats, miniature horses, and pigs being used to assist human, these are significantly few in number to warrant specific attention. Should somebody request access for their assistance goat or monkey, the decision should be made between the Ward Manager and Director of Nursing with advice from the Infection Control Doctor and Infection Prevention and Control Team.

- Mammalian pets other than dogs, such as rodents, rabbits, and cats should not be brought onto the hospital site for any reason.

**Non Mammals**
The increased popularity of reptilian pets has led to more snakes, lizards, and other reptiles being owned. Some people keep arachnids as pets. Fish and amphibians are also popular pets.

- Generally, no non-mammalian animals will be allowed into the hospital.

**Infections**
There are a number of zoonotic infections that animals can bring into the hospital environments. Even apparently healthy animals can bring with them *Clostridium difficile*, Giardia, and *Salmonella* (by reptiles). Transmission to humans is via direct or indirect contact with faeces.

Other zoonotic infections are ringworm, toxocariasis, and toxoplasmosis (from cat faeces).

Animal bites can also result in infections, including Tetanus and other bacterial infections.

- Any animal known to be unwell or suffering from vomiting and / or diarrhoea should not be allowed in to the hospital.

**Parasites**
Parasitic worms can be transmitted from animals to humans through direct or indirect contact with faeces. These include toxocariasis, and toxoplasmosis.

Fleas can also be transmitted to humans, although this is rare.

All visiting dogs should be regularly wormed and given preventative flea treatment.

**Allergies**
Animal allergens are a widespread cause of allergic reactions. These reactions can be caused by animal saliva, skin, and urine.

Any visiting animals should be kept well clear of patients and staff with known allergies to animals.

**Phobias**
Some people have a fear of a particular type of animal and will become extremely distressed should they be in close proximity to one. Any visiting animal should be kept well clear of patients, staff, or volunteers with known phobias.

### Main Body of the policy

#### 6.1 Guidance for all animal visits
The majority of cases of animals visiting the Trust will be assistance dogs accompanying their owners.

Pets are generally not permitted to accompany or visit their owners to hospital unless they are trained service animals. All service animals should be identifiable by a specific coat or harness. Should it be unclear whether an animal is a service animal, staff should ask directly whether the animal is in service.

**Health of the Animal**
Should the animal be visibly ill, e.g. suffering from diarrhea and/or vomiting, it should not be permitted into the hospital.

**Welfare of the Animal**

a. **Dogs in cars**
Dogs can die in hot cars, and patients and visitors should not keep their dog inside their car whilst they visit the hospital or use our services.

The RSPCA advises that:
*When it’s 22°C/72°F outside, the temperature inside a car can reach 47°C/117°F within 60 minutes.*

Heatstroke can be fatal to dogs. Should a member of staff or volunteer see a dog left alone in a hot car, they should notify their manager who should notify Security.

**Age Restrictions**
It is not acceptable for a dog to visit the hospital if it is a puppy (under 6 months old), heavily pregnant, or has recently given birth (and is therefore separated from its offspring). Service animals will not fall into these categories.
Food and water
Animals should be provided with clean drinking water. Owners should be encouraged to bring a drinking bowl with them. Portable travel bowls are useful.

Food should not normally be given to visiting animals unless the visit is for an extended period of time. Dogs should feed from a clean bowl provided by the owner and cleaned thoroughly afterwards by its owner and or immediate family/friends.

Stress and Anxiety
Even well trained dogs can suffer from stress and anxiety when put into unfamiliar and strange environment. Should a dog be showing signs of stress and agitation, it should be removed from the environment and taken somewhere to calm down and relax.

6.2 Visits by Service Animals
These dogs provide support in a range of ways that help their owners access services and maintain independence.

Unless there is a clinical or health and safety reason why a dog cannot be admitted into an area, service dogs should be permitted to accompany their owners while at the Trust.

Service dogs will likely accompany patients and visitors for short periods of time (for an Outpatients appointment or to visit a relative).

There is no need for any formal prior arrangements to be made for the visit of a service dog. The Trust is committed to providing ease of access for all, and recognises the role service animals play in helping facilitate access to services for those in need of assistance.

• Staff should welcome the patient or visitor, but not interact with a dog who is working.

6.3 PAT Animals
PAT dogs belong to volunteers who have trained them sufficiently to be passed by Pets as Therapy. PAT dog visits will be required to be arranged by Volunteer Services on behalf of or in conjunction with a relevant ward or department.

PAT dogs should remain with their owners whilst on site and remain on lead at all times. These dogs can be stroked and interacted with, but should a member of staff feel the dog or patients are stressed; the visit should be ended appropriately.

6.4 Patient Pets
GHNT has a number of long term inpatients. Some of these may have pet dogs that they would enjoy seeing. In this situation, should clinical staff deem it appropriate, a patient’s pet dog can be brought on to site to visit the patient. The location should be outside, at the discretion of staff.

Should staff feel the dog is a risk due to its behaviour towards others the visit should be ended appropriately. The dog must remain on lead at all times. Any toileting should be done outside and faeces disposed of in bins. The patient’s family or friends should ensure that water is provided for the dog during its visit and the dog should not be left alone in the car.

It is not appropriate for any animal to stay overnight in the hospital, or if the patient is critically ill. It would not normally be acceptable for a dog to be present with an in-patient as the patient would not be capable of looking after the animal adequately.

6.5 Infection Control and Health and Safety Risk
**Restricted Areas**

Assistance dogs are taught about dog-hygiene and how to groom and manage their dogs thoroughly to ensure that health risks are minimized. Assistance dogs are therefore welcome in most areas of the hospital.

There are occasions where it is not appropriate for assistance dogs to enter an area and as such a senior manager and/or HR lead for equality and diversity with advice from IPCT will liaise with the owner where the trust genuinely believes that there is a threat of endangering the disable person or others (infection prevention and control risk or if other patients have an allergy to dogs).

On this basis assistance dogs or other animals **will not be permitted** into the following areas under any circumstance:

- Operating theater environments including Anesthetic and recover rooms
- Any clinical procedure rooms
- High dependency and critical care unit
- Endoscopy
- Hematology
- Oncology
- Special care baby Unit
- Maternity
- Children’s areas without prior consent of consultant pediatrician and Matron
- Any area used for cooking or food preparation or eating
- No other area that is kept sterile or clinically clean by default.

In addition, if sterile or invasive procedures eg minor operations or endoscopes are to be carried out; it may be precautionary to exclude assistance dogs as there may be slight shedding of hair. However, if separation causes undue stress the assistance dog could be allowed into such areas, on the proviso that appropriate steps are taken to clean the area after the procedure.

Consideration of other vulnerable patients such as children or patients within mental health services should be given and the issue of whether or not it is appropriate for an assistance dog to be allowed in an area should be assessed on an individual basis by a senior manager in conjunction with the HR lead for equality and diversity and the IPCT.

**Religious objections**

The Trust does not consider religious objections as reasonable objections, as the Trust does not consider that an objection on religious grounds would justify its failure to comply with its duty to make reasonable adjustments, in accordance with the limited justification defense set out in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

**Provision for the assistance dog in the event of justifiable separation**

If it is absolutely necessary to separate the owner and the Assistance Dog, the period should be kept to the shortest time possible. The Assistance Dog should be left as near as possible to the owner. A quiet area should be identified where the Assistance Dog can remain out of the way of staff and patients and where they can lie quietly e.g. under a desk in the ward office or behind the reception desk. Areas of extreme temperature variation should be avoided e.g. in direct sunlight, next to radiators, heating vents or power cables. The avoidance of noise and drafts should be considered where possible.

Where Assistance Dogs are separated from their owner and hence “not working” their harness or working jackets should be removed. Tethering the Assistance Dog to something secure should be
considered. It must be noted where this happens so that the harness or jackets can be retrieved immediately for use.

**Cleaning**

Hand Hygiene is expected by patients, staff, and visitors following contact with the animal. Hand washing with soap and water must take place following handling of the animal in line with the Trust policy IC04.

**Animal waste**

If the animal urinates or defecates in an area, cleaning should be performed with appropriate PPE. Waste should be deposited in a plastic bag and disposed of in clinical waste. Disposable gloves and a plastic apron should be worn.

Following removal of the urine or faeces, the area should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

It is the responsibility of the ward manager in partnership with the animal’s owner/handler to ensure the area is cleaned appropriately. If additional cleaning is required the housekeeping team needs to be informed to undertake this.

7 **Training**

There are no specific training requirements identified however each member of staff should be aware of the policy and its application in practice for admitting animals to the Trust.

8 **Diversity and Inclusion**

The Trust is committed to ensuring that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the way we provide services to the public and the way we treat staff reflects their individual needs and does not unlawfully discriminate against individuals or groups on the grounds of any protected characteristic (Equality Act 2010). This policy aims to uphold the right of all staff to be treated fairly and consistently and adopts a human rights approach. This policy has been appropriately assessed.

9 **Monitoring compliance with the policy**

Compliance will be monitored through observation of practice and provision of advice when required.

Any incident or event involving a visiting animal should be recorded, reported and investigated appropriately.

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10 **Consultation and review**

This policy has been circulated to members of the IPCC and appropriate wider comment.
11 Implementation of policy (including raising awareness)

SLMs, matrons and ward managers should ensure that their staff is aware of this policy and its content.

12 References


Guay DR (2001); Pet-assisted therapy in the nursing home setting: Potential for zoonosis. American Journal of Infection Control; Jun; 29 (3); 178-86.

Khan MA, Farrag N. (2000); Animal-assisted activity and infection control implications in a healthcare setting; Journal of Hospital Infection; Sept; 46 (1); 4-11.

Lefebvre SL, Waltner-toews D, Peregrine AS (2006); Prevalence of Zoonotic agents in dogs visiting hospitalised people in Ontario: implication for infection control; Journal of Hospital Infection.; Vol 62; issue 4; April; 458-466.


Mayon-White, R., (2005); Pets – pleasures and problems; British Medical Journal; Nov 26; 331 (7527); 1254 – 1255.

13 Associated documentation

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Policies available on the intranet: http://pandora/docs/policies/DOCUMENTS%20POLICIES/Forms/Infection%20Control.aspx

IC02 - Personal Protection Equipment in Clinical Practice Policy
IC04 - Hand Hygiene Policy
IC09 - Waste disposal and Recycling Policy
IC15 - Cleaning and Disinfection Policy
RM01 – Risk Management Policy
RM02 – Health and safety Policy
RM04 Incident Reporting and Investigation policy
RM21 – Complaints and Concerns Policy