

**HACKETTSTOWN MEDICAL CENTER  
PHYSICAL/OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROCEDURE MANUAL  
ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY**

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**PURPOSE**

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a goal directed intervention using a certified animal which is guided by a health care professional (PT/OT/ST). The animal is incorporated as a treatment modality to motivate individuals as they engage in therapeutic activities identified in the plan of care to improve their performance skills.

Any animal used for the purpose of AAT will meet criteria and follow HRMC guidelines identified in Administrative policy AD13: Animal Visitation and Pet Therapy Policy.

**PROCEDURE**

Any pet owner/handler in the Therapy Center AAT program will maintain proof of appropriate certifications by a recognized agency, health requirements and identification in the department.

Signs will be posted in central visible location when the therapy animal is present.

Common wait areas will be designated as animal free zones and the pet will be limited to certain rooms (office, and only a few treatment rooms) to provide safe zones for those who cannot interact with the animal.

All clients with potential to participate in AAT will be informed and provided the opportunity to decline interaction with therapy animal.

Examples of intervention opportunities include:

- *Biofeedback for self-regulation* attempts to modulate animal behavior effects adjustments in client regulation of behaviors
- *Sensory processing skills*-integration of visual/auditory/tactile/proprioceptive input in interaction with animal
- *Motivation*-provides reward and encouragement
- *Increased personal interactions and social skills*-inhibitions in social interactions are often decreased with animal presence.
- *Facilitation of language skills*-clients are more motivated to communicate
- *Assist in participation of activities*-motor activities and ADL simulation

In all AAT interactions, the certified handler must be in control of the animal. In any circumstance where the client needs assistance this will be provided by an additional person (staff or family).

All clients should be evaluated and assessed for appropriateness in interactions for personal and animal safety. Handlers should be aware of basic signs of stress in their animal and make adjustments or remove the animal from stressful situation.

Objective documentation of treatment sessions will record AAT interactions consistent with documentation guidelines.