

Guidance on Animals and Pets in Health Care Facilities

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Local Delivery Plan		Business Planning	
Assurance Framework		Complaints	

Other (Please specify): Hygiene Code (Health and Social Care Act 2008),

Note: This policy has been assessed for any equality, diversity or human rights implications.

Controlled document

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1. Background

Pet animals can enhance the quality of life for many people. However, animals can carry microbes and parasites which can occasionally be transmitted to humans, particularly people who are immunosuppressed or who have other health problems. Some animals may be difficult to control and may pose a risk to patients or staff due to their behaviour. This infection control guidance provides advice across a range of health care settings where the risks posed vary considerably. Therefore a local risk assessment agreed with infection control is always necessary.

2. Acute General Hospitals (e.g. Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital) and PCT Hospitals

With the exception of guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs for the deaf, dogs for the disabled and animals which belong to the Pets as Therapy (PAT) scheme, animals and birds are not usually allowed.

However, there may be some exceptional circumstances e.g. on the request of a dying patient, where it may be beneficial for a pet to be brought to see an individual patient but such requests must always be discussed with the infection control team first and consideration given to the safety and perceptions of other patients and public.

2.1 Guide dogs for the blind and deaf and dogs for the disabled

Guide dogs for the blind and deaf and dogs for the disabled will accompany the patient wherever their guidance is needed throughout the acute care setting. However, the following principles apply:

- ◆ The dog must be properly supervised by its owner.
- ◆ Staff must wash their hands after handling the animal.
- ◆ The dog should not come into contact with open wounds
- ◆ The animal must not be allowed access to any kitchens or other food preparation areas
- ◆ If the animal urinates or defaecates it is the responsibility of the clinical staff to ensure that the contamination is cleaned up immediately, using appropriate personal protective equipment.
- ◆ Clinical staff must inform hotel/housekeeping services if any further cleaning is required.

2.2 PAT scheme animals

PAT scheme animals will have a record detailing their vaccinations, visits to the vet and state of health. They will be temperament assessed, fully wormed and covered by the PAT insurance scheme. They will be well behaved and be under the control of registered owners.

Where PAT scheme animals are allowed in health premises the following principles apply:

- ◆ Visits must be by prior arrangement and appointment only.
- ◆ It may be necessary to postpone visits if circumstances dictate on the day.
- ◆ The animal must be properly supervised by its registered owner.
- ◆ Wherever possible, animals should be allowed access to day rooms only
- ◆ Staff and patients must wash their hands after handling the animal.
- ◆ Staff must identify whether there are immunosuppressed or otherwise vulnerable patients. If such risk is identified the animal must be kept away from the patients at risk or even excluded from the clinical area.
- ◆ Animals should not come into contact with open wounds
- ◆ The animal must not be allowed access to any kitchens, food preparation areas and dining rooms.
- ◆ The animal must not be fed on the premises.
- ◆ The animal must be removed if showing any signs of illness.
- ◆ If the animal urinates or defaecates it is the responsibility of the clinical staff to ensure that the contamination is cleaned up immediately, using appropriate personal protective equipment.
- ◆ Clinical staff must inform hotel/housekeeping services if any further cleaning is required.

2.3 Fish Aquaria

An aquarium may be seen to be beneficial in some settings, such as outpatient waiting rooms and paediatric units, as watching fish is purported to have a calming effect and reduce stress. However, infection risks are posed by aquarium water. Therefore, a maintenance contract with an aquaria maintenance specialist must be established. The contract must be established via the Procurement Department.

3. Mental Health, Learning Disability and Rehabilitation Units

In general, the above principles also apply. However, in some residential settings it may be beneficial for there to be a resident pet. In such situations, the pet must be vaccinated, wormed, kept free of fleas, ticks and scabies mites, and housetrained. Appropriate hygiene measures must also be maintained for caged animals and birds. Pets must not be allowed access to or fed in kitchens, food preparation areas or dining rooms. Always seek infection control advice prior to purchase.

Bibliography

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