

AFT: Proposed Standards

*Linda Hume, AFT Specialist
Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital*

Page 1 of 2

I. Animal Characteristics & Training

A "Rehabilitation Dog" is an animal that is trained to work with a patient during a treatment (physical, occupational, speech therapy or therapeutic recreation) session. A designated trained handler directs the dog and works closely with a certified therapist in facilitating the use of the dog in the treatment session.



- A minimum of 50 hours training over three (3) months should take place. Of this, at least 15 hours should take place in a health care setting, and 10 hours should be devoted to public exposure and field trips.
- The dog should be able to perform basic obedience skills with voice and hand signals, including: "sit", "heel", "down", "stay", "come". Dogs should display controlled behavior both on and off lead.
- The dog must display good 'social' skills: i.e., must not show any signs of aggression, no nuisance barking, no biting or snapping, no growling, no jumping on people, no aggression toward other animals, and no "begging" for food.
- A Rehabilitation Dog should perform a recall both on and off lead at varying distances in a controlled, obedient manner, ending at either a sit or stand, with no jumping up. The dog must be able to respond to either a verbal or gestural command and return to a designated person as directed by the handler.
- Dogs must be trained to retrieve objects of various sizes, textures, and weights and return them to a specific person, as directed by the handler. Although the dog may show enthusiasm while performing the exercise, it must accomplish the retrieve promptly, under full control, with no nipping or pawing at the patient, handler, or therapist.
- The dog must be able to walk in a controlled manner on the right or left, next to the following devices: walker, crutches, cane, manual or electric wheelchair, and stretcher. If accompanying a person without a device, but whose gait is unsteady, the dog must walk carefully alongside, adapting his gait to the speed and cadence of the person.
- The dog must stand, sit or lie quietly on the floor, mat or table to allow a person to brush, pat or generally interact with him. The animal must also be able to tolerate general touching/handling that includes feet and ears.
- All dogs must have passed a thorough temperament and health screening. Vaccinations must be up to date with records kept on file at each health care facility that utilizes its service.

AFT: Proposed Standards

*Linda Hume, AFT Specialist
Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital*

Page 2 of 2

- All dogs must be properly treated by being provided with appropriate exercise, food, water, and avoiding exposure to persons or situations which may cause undue harm or prove hazardous.
- Rehab Dog access is not recognized as canine assistance under the ADA.

II. Animal Facilitated Treatment (AFT) Programs:

- Adherence must be maintained to all relevant state and federal regulations re: pets in health care facilities.
- Each therapist who works in treatment sessions with rehab dogs must receive a minimum of 8 hours orientation as to the use of AFT in therapy sessions with an emphasis on safety.
- Each patient who receives a referral to utilize animal facilitated therapy must have a written order from his or her physician, and an assessment done by a health care professional, nurse, therapist, or animal facilitated therapy specialist.
- Long and short term goals must be set by the therapist for each patient and careful documentation must be kept of each person's progress. This documentation should be a part of the patients' medical record.