

Webster House Health Center Enriches Senior Lives with Pet Therapy Program

Weekly sessions with animals delight patients and treat a variety of health problems and mental disorders



WHHC Resident Liz Olshausen cuddles with mild mannered Jake.

(Palo Alto, CA, June 15, 2016) --- Webster House Health Center (WHHC), a premier Bay Area health center in Palo Alto, has more than an award-winning staff treating their residents--they have canine helpers, too! WHHC takes a holistic approach toward care, utilizing diverse treatments that include a fantastic pet therapy program.

Pet therapy is designed to treat a variety of health problems and mental disorders, such as dementia, anxiety, isolation, emotional behavior, autism, developmental disabilities, terminal disease and chronic pain. By focusing a patient's thoughts outward, perception of pain is dulled and anxiety is reduced. Interacting with animals can also improve fine motor skills, improve self esteem, augment the ability to care for oneself, alleviate depression, reduce anxiety or even lessen the need for medication.

At Webster House Health Center, pet therapy sessions take place weekly. Dogs are brought to the center and taken to all three floors to visit the residents. On the third and fourth floors, where the memory patients are cared for, the dogs visit the seniors in groups. On the second floor, some patients are not able to leave their beds, so the dogs do individual visits in addition to group time.

Two particular dogs, Jake and Charlie, are the center's most beloved "pet therapists." They have been coming to the center for three years, and both are rescue dogs who have had check-ups at Furry Friends, a group in Fremont that does dog examinations once a year. WHHC ensures that the dogs' rabies shots are up to date, and before the visits to the center, the canine helpers take a bath, get their ears cleaned and their toenails trimmed before interacting with the residents.

The residents love the visits, becoming noticeably more lively and cheerful with the animals. One resident, Liz Olshausen, said, "We absolutely love the pet therapy sessions. I also love that they use rescue dogs for the program; I think it's very important. It's as if they feel our pain."

The effects of the pet therapy are evident. In one case, a resident was experiencing an anxiety attack and was on oxygen, unable to talk; when she saw the dogs come to visit, she started talking, calmed down, smiled and laughed as she petted them. Many residents have an enduring love for animals, and these visits are like a taste of home, brightening their moods. Patients also form relationships with particular dogs and look forward to their regular visits.

WHHC's pet therapy sessions are among many great activities which enrich seniors' lives and improve their experience during their stay at the center. For more information about WHHC's enrichment activities, please visit: <http://www.jtm-esc.org/webster-house-health-center/enrichment-activities/>

About Episcopal Senior Communities (ESC): Webster House Health Center is part of the Episcopal Senior Communities, a 50 year old Bay Area organization whose mission is to "cultivate and build healthy communities with a continuum of residential and innovative aging services that actively promote intellectual, physical, social and spiritual well-being." ESC is a California nonprofit benefit corporation which is tax exempt under Section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS code.

#