



Institutional Handbook of Operating Procedures
Policy 09.03.14

Section: Clinical	Responsible Vice President: Executive Vice President and CEO Health System
Subject: Admission/Discharge/Transfer	Responsible Entity: Health System Operations

I. Title

[Service Animals](#)

II. Policy

- A. Patients with disabilities who bring [service animals](#) with them when they visit UTMB hospital and ambulatory practices/clinics will be reasonably accommodated in compliance with state and federal laws and in compliance with this policy. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), hospitals and other healthcare facilities must allow people with disabilities to bring their [service animals](#) into all areas of the hospital that are open to the public. Animals displaying [unacceptable behavior](#) or those that may present a threat to others will not be allowed to stay with the patient.

- B. [Therapy](#) and [companion](#) animals are not [service animals](#) and are not routinely permitted to accompany their owners. Visitation may be arranged after consulting with the physician, nurse manager, and Infection Control. This policy does not violate the ADA because the ADA does not apply to [therapy](#) or [companion](#) animals.

- C. If the animal's health is questionable, the animal will not be permitted to accompany the patient without proof of vaccination or the animal's health records. All animals must be on a leash, harness or under their handler's (or designee) control at all times. The care, hygiene, control and supervision of the animal is the primary responsibility of the patient or the patient's designee including removal of the animal from the premises. If the patient or the patient's designee cannot perform these responsibilities, alternative care for the animal will be coordinated by UTMB which may include boarding the animal at the owner's expense, if applicable.

- D. Staff must contact the Clinical Operations Administrator and Patient Services to alert them of the admission of a patient with a [service animal](#).

- E. [Service animals](#) will not routinely be permitted into UTMB [areas](#) that are not open to the public, but may be permitted on a case by case review by the respective administrator of that area.

- F. In addition, [service animals](#) are not permitted in areas in which special precautions are required, such as wearing masks, gloves, and gowns.

- G. If the patient is immunocompromised, the physician will be consulted before the [service animal](#) is allowed to visit/stay with the patient. If there are other clinical concerns, the attending physician will be consulted.

III. Procedures

- A. Staff will not ask about the nature of the disability, require “proof” of the animal’s training or identification of the person’s disability as that inquiry violates ADA and other federal nondiscrimination laws. Staff may only ask:
 - 1. Is the animal required because of a disability?; and
 - 2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?
- B. For example, the patient may say it is required for a disability, then you may ask the task and the patient may say “the dog has been trained to pick things up when I drop something” or “the dog has been trained to vigorously lick my face to help me cope with emotional overload.”
- C. Health care facilities are advised to accept the verbal assurance of the person that he or she has a disability and that the animal is a [service animal](#).
- D. The animal must be well groomed and appear healthy. Health conditions that would exclude the animal from the hospital include, but are not limited to, gastroenteritis, obvious flea or mite infestation, skin lesions, coughing, or poor grooming.
- E. Exceptions for compassionate care will be considered and visit must be arranged in advance with Nurse Manager, Infection Control and/or Clinical Operations Administrator.
- F. Concerns not addressed in this policy should be directed to the respective area’s direct management, Patient Relations, Epidemiology and after hours to the Clinical Operations Administrator.
- G. Rules for Staff and other Patients:
 - 1. Remember that a [service animal](#) is a working animal.
 - 2. Do not pet the [service animal](#). This will distract from its work.
 - 3. Do not feed the [service animal](#) unless the patient gives you permission.
 - 4. Minimize activities that may startle the [service animal](#).
 - 5. Do not call the [service animal](#) or try to get the service animal’s attention.
 - 6. Do not attempt to separate a [service animal](#) from its handler.

IV. Definitions

Service Animals: Service animals are animals that are individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Some of the common tasks performed by service animals are: guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, fetching items, and protecting people with documented disabilities. An animal does not have to be licensed or certified as a service animal.

Therapy Animals: Therapy animals have been trained, tested, certified and insured to work in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other institutional settings. The therapy animal and its handler visit to cheer patients, to educate the community, to counter grief and stress, and generally act as animal ambassadors within the community. (Please refer to [Epidemiology 01.35 Animal Assisted Therapy](#).)

Companion Animals: Many individuals with disabilities are comforted and emotionally supported by the presence of a therapy animal or a companion animal. Such animals are not service animals.

Unacceptable animal behavior: These behaviors include, but are not limited to growling, excessive whining, barking, and inappropriate elimination.

V. Relevant Federal and State Statutes

[Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 and as Amended 2008 \(ADAAA\), 42 U.S.C. 12101, Subchapter II](#)

VI. Related UTMB Policies and Procedures

Epidemiology [Policy 01.35 Animal Assisted Therapy](#)

VII. Additional References

[Service Animals ADA 2010 Revised Requirements](#)

[Service Animal Decision Tree](#)

VIII. Dates Approved or Amended

<i>Originated: 3/20/2015</i>	
<i>Reviewed with Changes</i>	<i>Reviewed without Changes</i>
	04/10/2018

Service Animal Decision Tree

