



Common Sense Rules When Service Dogs Visit Hospital

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ALTON, IL – People who have service animals might feel even more of a need to have their furry friend with them while staying in the hospital. Fortunately, that shouldn't be a problem as long as common sense prevails.

Alton Memorial Hospital has a policy that allows service animals in the hospital “as necessary to assist a patient, family member and/or other visitor with a disability.” Additionally, other pets and social animals – as long as they are dogs or cats – are permitted to visit specific inpatients when prior arrangements are made.

Sandra Chambers of Bethalto was an inpatient at AMH this summer for two days on the Medical Care Unit, during which time her service dog, an 8-year-old Boxer named Shyannie, was with her the whole time.

“It was an excellent experience at Alton Memorial,” Chambers said. “I had a bad experience at another hospital a few years ago, and it was mostly because the staff wasn't educated about service animals.”

Chambers has had service dogs for many years for physical and emotional reasons, and also has trained others who have service dogs.

“First of all, only dogs are considered service animals,” she said, adding that miniature horses also meet that classification in some parts of the country. “And they are classified as durable medical equipment. They are there to do a specific job for their handlers. If they're not doing a job, they aren't service animals. So taking your service dog away would be like taking away your wheelchair.”

Hospital staff needs to make sure the service dog is clean, and the owner has provided evidence of current rabies and distemper vaccinations, plus other vaccinations as appropriate.

“The animal is not allowed in any clean rooms of the hospital where a cap and gown is required,” Chambers said. “And it’s the patient’s job to make sure the dog gets out to do its business. And if the patient is so incapacitated that they can’t do that, they should have someone else there with them who can. It is not the hospital’s responsibility to provide that type of care for the dog. It’s nice if they ask, but it is not required.”

The AMH policy requires that the patient’s bed is protected with a bath blanket or other barrier if the patient wants the animal on the bed, and the animal should be “on a short leash or appropriately restrained.”

“It’s common sense, for the most part,” Chambers said. “I was able to move around while I was here, but my husband was here for a while to take Shyannie out if needed. The staff was wonderful. I can’t thank Alton Memorial Hospital enough for how we were treated.”



Sandra Chambers, center, and her service dog Shyannie, with AMH nurses, left to right, Joni Miley, Amy Toenyes and Debbie Lybarger.