

## General Guidelines when Working with Stroke Patients

### Introduction

This factsheet has been designed to assist Pets As Therapy volunteers who are asked by a healthcare professional to become involved in stroke rehabilitation work. The factsheet will help you to provide the most appropriate and helpful input when assisting health care professionals with the rehabilitation goals of their patients. There are also a full set of guidelines available from Pets As Therapy. If you would like a copy please contact Head Office on 01865 671440 or email: [reception@petsastherapy.org](mailto:reception@petsastherapy.org).

Please let us know if you have any experience of working with stroke patients and could add anything to our guidelines.

### Facts about stroke

A stroke occurs suddenly, with immediate effects. There are 2 main causes of stroke: **Ischaemic** caused by a blockage and **Haemorrhagic** caused by a bleed.

During a stroke, the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off. This results in a disruption to the body's normal workings, for example eating and drinking, speech and mobility.

### How can a person's life be affected by a stroke?

There are a wide range of possible effects of having a stroke, including physical, psychological and emotional.

There are both short and long term effects of stroke and full recovery from stroke can take up to a year.

### Common problems occurring after a stroke

**Physical problems** – e.g. pain; weakness or paralysis; problems with the bladder and bowels; sensation problems; balance problems; swallowing problems; problems with eyesight, fatigue and difficulty sleeping.

**Emotional and psychological difficulties** – e.g. mood swings, depression, sadness, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem and loss of confidence.

**Difficulties with interpretation & perception** – e.g. recognising and using familiar objects

Speech, language and communication difficulties.

**Cognitive processes** – e.g. difficulties with concentration, memory and learning.

**NB:** All stroke rehabilitation work that is undertaken by Pets As Therapy volunteers **MUST** be under the guidance and direct supervision of a healthcare professional.

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## PAT Dogs in Stroke Rehabilitation

Pets As Therapy volunteers, along with their PAT Dog or PAT Cat work closely with the healthcare therapists; including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists or a combination of all three. The Pets As Therapy team may be involved in either an informal **walkabout** or in **group or individual structured sessions** with patients and with any or all of these healthcare professionals.

**Structured sessions** are likely to involve specific goals for the client/patient which the Pets As Therapy team can assist with. Examples of goals, *which are **always** set by the healthcare professional and remain their responsibility*, include: improvement in gross movements, such as trunk or limb mobility through reaching out to stroke the PAT Dog or throwing an object to retrieve or, fine motor movements, for example, movement of the hand or fingers, through for example, clipping and unclipping leads and collars.

## Walkabout - Visits to stroke wards

**Please remember that you should never engage a patient in any rehabilitation activity without the supervision or permission of a health care professional.** Stroking PAT Dog or PAT Cat is acceptable, but do not undertake any other activity with the patient, such as brushing or playing with the PAT Dog or PAT Cat, without the direct supervision of a healthcare professional.

## General things to look out for include:

- Cognitive skills may be affected and so a person may have trouble finding words as well as perhaps forming the words in their speech.
- If a patient has suffered any paralysis down one side they sometimes neglect this side. Therapists will encourage them to be aware of the neglected side. So it can be helpful to position your PAT Dog or PAT Cat at the patient's affected side.

## Animal welfare - points for consideration

- Whilst the patient is being helped by staff to stroke or brush the PAT Dog or PAT Cat, neither patient nor staff may be aware if the patient is putting too much weight on the animal due to their lack of balance.
- Sometimes objects may be thrown to encourage hand and arm mobility. Due to the difficulties in aiming, sometimes objects can go astray and may land on the PAT Dog or PAT Cat. This may be a consideration for the types of objects chosen for the session.

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