

# Initiative to Create Therapy Dog Program to Support Primary Care and Promote Animal-Assisted Therapy



Written on behalf of Putnam Hospital Center  
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20 November 2024

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20 November 2024

The Lacey Family Foundation  
73 Worth Street, Suite 5F  
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Dear Board of Trustees members,

It is with great pleasure that I submit this grant proposal to the Lacey Family Foundation on behalf of Putnam Hospital Center. Servicing the Hudson Valley and western Connecticut, Putnam Hospital Center offers a multitude of innovative health care services, and we are looking to launch a therapy dog program as a complementary form of care. The purpose of this grant proposal is to illustrate the development and implementation of *Paws for Wellness*, a therapy dog program that hosts weekly sessions, during which patients can meet and interact with our therapy dogs. We are requesting \$2700 to adopt, train, and certify our first therapy dog.

This project proposal includes information on the main points and features of *Paws for Wellness*, as well as how they will best be implemented. Inside you will also find sections dedicated to how we plan to make our program sustainable in the long-term and how we plan to promote animal-assisted therapy during our weekly sessions. We also include a description of the available facilities where we plan to post our sessions, as well as our requirements and plans to find qualified personnel whose involvement is critical to the program.

Throughout this proposal, you will also find that we reference the New York State Department of Agriculture and Market's guidelines on therapy dogs and their handlers. Given that we are operating out of Putnam County, New York, it is important that we follow these guidelines closely, and we identify how exactly we do this. Considering that this program offers a hands-on introduction to and promotes the education of animal-assisted therapy and serves to help those at Putnam Hospital Center undergoing treatment and care, we believe that that *Paws for Wellness* is the perfect candidate to receive funding from the Lacey Family foundation. If you have any comments or questions about our proposal, please email me at [gleidich@umass.edu](mailto:gleidich@umass.edu) or call me at 914-536-2811.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Gianna Leidich

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# 1. Statement of the Problem

We naturally associate dogs with positive feelings, such as warmth, friendliness, and love, and therapy dogs—dogs who are trained to support and work with humans—are not the exception. Therapy dogs are largely valued for their uplifting presence, but their work extends beyond such positive emotions; in the hospital setting in particular, therapy dogs become even more valuable: “positive human-dog interactions [...] are impactful across the three influencers of health (biological, psychological, and social)” (Gee et al. 6). Therapy dog not only help us feel better, but actually touch and improve upon the main areas of human health. Further research shows that “short-term [...] interactions with a therapy dog” have helped to reduce patients’ “anxiety and distress levels” (3). Therapy dogs’ help to underscore patients’ methods of primary care by providing emotional support which indirectly ameliorates other aspects of patients’ health.

This type of care, commonly known as animal-assisted therapy, cannot be understated, but is unfortunately the case that many hospitals do not have the means to support it. Because such programs are considered secondary care and most hospitals direct funding towards more concrete methods of care, therapy dog programs are not always created nor offered. And while many hospitals welcome patients’ own therapy dogs, many patients might not have one, nor the ability for care for one, especially if the patient themselves is undergoing treatment and recovery. As a result, many patients who would benefit from the presence of therapy dogs and/or programs that offer that, are left without either.

Many hospitals are considering and implementing therapy dog programs. Putnam Hospital Center, despite being one of the largest hospitals to serve Putnam and Westchester County, New York, does not have any sort of therapy dog program. Patients that would like therapy dog interactions do not currently have an easily accessible option: there exists a program local to the hospital, Putnam Service Works, that works to provide free service dogs to those who qualify, but this is not suitable for a therapy dog program that is located at and provided by the hospital. That, and the case of providing limited



*Figure 1: Student at UMass Amherst interacts with therapy dog during finals week. Source: Choudhury, Eva. 4 Dec. 2024.*

interactions with therapy dogs is much different from that of needing a service dog 24/7—the work of therapy dogs and service dogs do deviate significantly, despite the large amount of overlap. There is also Northern Westchester Hospital that also services Putnam and Westchester and offers a therapy dog program. But Northern Westchester Hospital is about a 30-minute drive from Putnam Hospital Center, and it is unreasonable for a patient to let the existence of such a program to determine where they receive care—and in many cases, patients might not have the choice.

Creating a therapy dog program at Putnam Hospital Center can work in conjunction with the existing primary methods of care the hospital provides and accentuate their commitment to “providing safe, compassionate care” (“Putnam Hospital”). It also offers an accessible option for patients who would like to experience animal-assisted therapy. Furthermore, the areas of health that the dogs can naturally improve upon are difficult to do so with sterile medicine and treatment, and as such, this program can offer what those care methods cannot: emotional and mental support. It is our goal to develop *Paws for Wellness* to fill this vacuum at Putnam Hospital Center and necessarily uplift patients by touching upon their mental and emotional health through our therapy dogs.



Figure 2: Patients and health care workers interact with small therapy dog at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Source: Davidson, Caitlund. “Paws and Relax: Therapy Dogs for Hospital Staff.” Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, 5 July 2023, [tbrhsc.net/paws-and-relax-therapy-dogs-for-hospital-staff/](https://tbrhsc.net/paws-and-relax-therapy-dogs-for-hospital-staff/). Accessed 10 Dec. 2024.

## 2. Statement of Request

We are requesting the Lacey Family Foundation to support our therapy dog program, *Paws for Wellness*, located at Putnam Hospital Center, by funding \$2700 to be used to initiate and implement the program. This grant would provide us with the necessary means to obtain and train our first therapy dog.

*Paws for Wellness* will allow patients receiving treatment at Putnam Hospital Center, as well as their loved ones and hospital staff, to have weekly interactions with therapy dogs in group settings, promoting community and animal-assisted therapy as a form of care. These interactions will be hosted in dayrooms inside the hospital, allowing it to be a program that is easily accessible for our intended audience. Furthermore, the patient-therapy dog interactions at our weekly sessions will do much to benefit the former's health—supporting their mental and emotional health, in particular—ultimately supporting their health journey and recovery.

## 3. Description of Proposed Project

### 1. Objectives

- Connect patients and therapy dogs on a weekly basis.
- Promote animal-assisted therapy as a means of complementary care.
- Educate our attendees on animal-assisted therapy and how it functions.
- Offer trained therapy dogs up for adoption after retired from the program.

### 2. Schedule

*Paws for Wellness* will be a program offered by Putnam Hospital Center in Putnam County, New York and take place on the hospital's campus. This program will allow patients receiving treatment at the hospital to interact with our therapy dogs during the duration of their stay. Because we want to encourage all patients to have a chance to see and spend time with our therapy dogs, we will not exact a restriction on who is and is not allowed to see them. That is, we will welcome all able and eligible patients to participate in our meetings. We will schedule weekly sessions with the therapy dogs, a particular time every week, as an established, recurring schedule will make it easy for us to promote the program for new and old patients.



We will advertise *Paws for Wellness* by posting flyers throughout the hospital and sending out emails to hospital staff. The flyers will serve as a signal, letting patients know that such a program exists and is available to them. It will include information about where and when our weekly sessions will take place, as well as information about our therapy dog, such as a picture and name, to get patients excited and eager to participate. This clearly communicates what our program is all about and allows the patient to get somewhat familiar with our therapy dog and make their expectations of the program accordingly. On the other hand, the emails to hospital staff will include the same information, but with more elaboration on our mission and what we wish to accomplish with our program. This way, hospital staff can accurately relate our program and how to get involved with it to unaware patients, who can then decide for themselves if it is something in which they are interested.

### 3. Structure

The weekly sessions will be held in a communal space inside the hospital and be conducted in a group setting. Sessions will last for an hour, and patients that wish to attend can arrive some time before or during the session and may be accompanied by a caretaker, family member, or friend. At the beginning of each session, the therapy dog's handler will introduce themselves and their dog to the group. During this introduction, the handler will explain what the purpose of the session is and elaborate on how therapy dogs are able to function as complementary form of care. The former part of the introduction will remind the patients of how the session can help them and reaffirm their own expectation of it, and the latter will briefly educate them on the concept of animal-assisted therapy. This can be especially useful to patients new to the program and/or familiar with animal-assisted therapy before getting started.

### 4. Obtaining and Training Therapy Dogs

This entire program hinges on our ability to obtain therapy dogs. Because purchasing a fully trained therapy dog is quite expensive, it would be best to obtain dogs and train them to become therapy dogs as part of the program, especially in the early development stage. The Putnam Humane Society is an animal shelter that is an ideal location from which we can obtain our dogs as it is located near the hospital and already has many dogs up for adoption. The adoption fee for a dog is \$240.00, and that fee increases to \$275.00 if we adopt a puppy



Figure 3: Katia, a dog at the Putnam Humane Society. Source: "My name is Katia!" Adopt a Pet, Kinship Partners Inc & Affiliates, 2024, [www.adoptapet.com.pet/33629146-carmely-new-york-rhodesian-ridgeback-mix](http://www.adoptapet.com.pet/33629146-carmely-new-york-rhodesian-ridgeback-mix). Accessed 10 Dec. 2024.

("Putnam Humane Society"). But given that our training program works best with adult dogs, we will opt towards the former option.

New York State's Department of Agriculture and Markets outlines certain standards that therapy dogs and their handlers must uphold in order to work. Therapy dogs must be licensed and trained, and our initial budget will mostly be spent here, following these steps:

1. **Choosing a therapy dog organization:** According to the department's guidelines, therapy dogs in New York are required to be registered with "a therapy dog organization whose standards are consistent" with their own ("Guidance for Handlers" 1). This includes ensuring the dog has a "humane experience" and is never mistreated by their handler or people it services (2). As such, we will need to select an organization that follows those guidelines and is suitable for our program.

Such an organization is Alliance of Therapy Dogs, as dogs can be both registered and licensed by the organization. Alliance of Therapy Dogs provides what the department refers to as "an appropriate level of insurance coverage" as its membership fee of \$30/year covers insurance. It also has "policies in place that minimize the risk of infection," such as requiring a vet visit upon registration and updated vaccinations (3). In addition to the yearly membership fee, there also exists a one-time registration fee of \$15 ("Join the Alliance of Therapy Dogs"). Since Alliance of Therapy Dogs closely follows New York State guidelines and is an affordable option for our program, it is currently our ideal candidate for registering and certifying our therapy dogs.

2. **Meeting the requirements:** We will need to train our dogs such that they are able to behave appropriately in the program setting and get licensed by our selected organization. It would be best for our dog to participate in group obedience training courses because they will best allow the dog to get comfortable around a lot of people and other animals. The latter reason is especially important, given the setting of our program: our dog will be around hospital patients and must be trained to remain calm in such a large group. Group lessons are also less expensive when compared to private lessons. There exist programs in Putnam and Westchester County which we can work with to train our dogs, such as Dog Training Elite, based in Westchester. A cost estimate for the entire training process is about \$1000 to \$2000 per dog ("Therapy Dog Training"). This is where the bulk of the budget will be spent.



3. **Getting licensed:** To ensure that we are following New York State guidelines and regulations revolving therapy dogs, we must get our therapy dog licensed by a reputable organization. As above-mentioned, Alliance of Therapy Dogs is an ideal candidate. After completing their required paperwork and proving our dog has been trained thus far, we contact a tester and schedule a test. We would like a tester close to Putnam Hospital Center and there are a couple of them located in New York and Connecticut. Alliance of Therapy Dogs provides their contact information, including phone number and email, that our handler can use to schedule the meeting.

To get licensed, we will also need to show proof of a vet visit, negative fecal exam, and a rabies vaccination (“Guidance for Handlers” 1). Because shelters in New York are required that their dogs already be vaccinated against rabies, it is likely that we will only need to complete the former two. A preferable vet clinic for both procedures is Putnam Animal Wellness (PAW), located in Brewster, New York. Putnam Animal Wellness is local to the area and is relatively inexpensive for our needs. According to their website, an examination for a health dog is \$42 and a fecal exam is \$59 (“Services”).



*Figure 4: Pomeranian at the Putnam Animal Wellness. Source: “About Us.” Putnam Animal Wellness, Putnam Animal Wellness PLLC, 2018, [putnamanimalwellness.com/](http://putnamanimalwellness.com/). Accessed 10 Dec. 2024.*

Thus, with all these expenses going into just *one* dog, to initialize our program, it would be best to just focus on and train one dog, before expanding in the future. Having one dog to service a smaller group of patients will suffice.

## 5. Sustainability

The main expenses of the program come from adopting and training the therapy dogs. To ensure that this program can continue beyond the initial fund, our proposed idea is to put our therapy dogs up for adoption, once they have gained experiencing working in the program. Patients that have connected with a particular therapy dog during their visitations and/or hospital workers that have grown familiar with the dogs might be incentivized to adopt one after the dog has retired from the program. Such motives are ameliorated by the fact that these dogs have experience and training from the program and are already licensed therapy dogs.

We will opt for a private adoption, by advertising the adoption in the same ways we advertise the program: flyers posted around the hospital and emails to staff inboxes. If a person wishes to adopt one of our therapy dogs, we will include information on how to contact us, so we can proceed with the adoption. New York State also has guidelines on adoption: “non-profit entities that offer animal adoptions in New York are required to register with the Department [of Agriculture and Markets] (“Shelter and Rescue Registration”). We have decided that, since these forms and procedure is more geared towards non-profits whose main mission the adoption and rescuing of animals, we would like to again work with the Putnam Humane Society. Though, it is principle to mention that we will *not* be sending our retired dogs back to the shelter, as that is rather inhumane and cruel. Instead, we will be working with them to find forever homes for our therapy dogs, particularly with those who will benefit most from having one. Potential owners who fall into that category can be assured that our therapy dogs are well-trained and well-kept for, and have plenty experience from participating in our program. Furthermore, while the adoption process takes place, our therapy dogs will remain with their respective handlers. And if any particular handler wishes to adopt a dog with whom they have been working, we will also facilitate that option.

A price range for one of our therapy dogs is \$500 to \$1500. It is important that we are able to generate some sort of funds from the process, but also important that we make our price reasonable and attainable for those who are interested. The adoption funds will go directly back into the program: we will use them to adopt and train another therapy dog. As a result, we can allow the program to sustain itself in the long-term after the initial fund has been used, by generating these ones. Of course, we will strive to avoid a revolving door of adopting dogs, training them, and then putting them up for adoption. Once we have trained

a dog, we would like to have that dog in our program for as long as possible. Thus, a proposed rule-of-thumb for putting our dogs up for adoption is if either when they are too old to continue working and/or after 2–3 years of experience in the program.

## 6. Promotion and Education of Animal-Assisted Therapy

Promoting animal-assisted therapy as a form of care is best done via a hands-on experience and *Paws for Wellness* definitely fits into this category. Because we are letting patients at Putnam Hospital Center visit with therapy dogs, they can feel for themselves what the animal is doing for them, even if subconsciously. Whether our dog makes a patient feel happy and excited or calm and reassured, there will exist *some* positive emotion felt, and that feeling is what we are trying to promote; that is, we are trying to show that therapy dogs, and other therapy animals by extension, can actually have a measurable impact on those with whom they are in contact. This impact is best felt, not described, and this is exactly what *Paws for Wellness* is doing by allowing patients and their loved ones to interact with therapy dogs on a weekly basis.

Furthermore, it might also be the case that *Paws for Wellness* is the primary introduction to animal-assisted therapy for many patients. Specifically, there might be patients who are discovering what animal-assisted therapy is and how it can help them through our program. As such, we are necessarily promoting the concept and benefits of animal-assisted therapy by launching it. This is especially true considering we are operating in a hospital setting, where this type of therapy can be seen as complementary to other forms of primary care. In fact, animal-assisted therapy might fill a “vacuum” of care: many primary forms

of care offered by the hospital do not touch upon certain areas of health, such as mental and emotional well-being. And in some cases, some treatments, although alleviating to the body, can have a negative impact on those areas of health, especially if the procedure is painful and/or costly. *Paws for Wellness* is supplementing more traditional forms of mental and emotional therapy, allowing patients to receive that form of care, in addition to their



Figure 5: Students interacting with a therapy dog. Source: Bard, Megan. “Inside the Key Roles Therapy Dogs Play on and off Campus.” *Holy Cross Magazine*, College of the Holy Cross, [magazine.holycross.edu/stories/inside-key-roles-therapy-dogs-play-and-campus](http://magazine.holycross.edu/stories/inside-key-roles-therapy-dogs-play-and-campus). Accessed 10 Dec. 2024.

others. So, while they might not have entered the hospital seeking animal-assisted therapy, patients can discover it through our program and reap its benefits while here. On their own, they might then be inclined to learn more about it and involve themselves further.

As an introductory program, *Paws for Wellness* also does much in the department of education. An example is the introduction given by our handler at each session, as it includes information about the main functions of therapy dogs, what our purpose is, and how to best interact with them. Although brief, this will give patients a clear understanding of our mission and how we utilize animal-assisted therapy as a form of treatment. But more than this is the behaviors and care from the dogs themselves, because while the given speech and facts about animal-assisted therapy can interest patients and loved ones, it is again the emotions and care that they receive from the therapy dogs that will truly impress upon them the value of animal-assisted therapy. This interaction as a form of education itself cannot be understated. And should a patient wish to further learn more about animal-assisted therapy, we can direct them to our handler and even create hand-outs with some facts and resources for them.

## 4. Description of Measure of Project Success

To measure the program's success, we can both collect attendance records and give our attendees satisfaction surveys. The former would *not* include personal information, such as the patient's name, age, etc., to ensure that we are following the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("Guidelines for Handlers" 2). Instead, our attendance record would simply be a headcount of all those who attended: the patients themselves, any caretakers and loved ones, and all staff members not directly involved with the program. What this allows us to do is compare our sessions' attendance over time and analyze if our program is growing, remaining consistent, or worse, decreasing. If our weekly attendance is non-decreasing, then we can conclude that we are running successful sessions and that our program is doing well and achieving its main objectives. On the other hand, if our weekly attendance is decreasing, then we can use that as a sign that our program might need some improvement and investigate into what we can modify, such that we increase our attendance over time.

In addition to collecting attendance records, we will also hand out satisfaction surveys at the conclusion of each session. Such questions can include: "How would you rate this overall experience", "What is one aspect of the program that you enjoyed?", "What is one aspect of the program that you would change?" Handing out this survey and having our attendees fill it out allows us to gain insight into how they truly felt about the experience. These first-hand, personal experiences can be used to exact what parts of the

program are working and what parts might need some adjustments. And while the survey is important for our own insight, it is also necessary to guarantee that we are closely New York State’s guidelines, which state that we “should solicit feedback from clients regarding their experiences with the program” (5).

It is important to note that we would want to orient feedback towards our program specifically (that is, we should keep their opinions about their experience at Putnam Hospital Center, unrelated to the program, at a minimum) such that we can actually make improvements over what we can directly control. Multiple reports of patient satisfaction and enjoyment points towards success, and if multiple reports return negative, we can use their specific reasons as to why to refine and improve the program.

## 5. Description of Available Facilities

There are several dayrooms—rooms where patients can socialize, relax, and engage in activities outside of their own rooms—that we can use to host our weekly sessions. Other hospital events are typically held in these dayrooms, and they should be large enough to fit a small group, our staff, and our therapy dogs. If the program grows substantially larger in the future, then it is possible we will need to expand to other dayrooms. For example, splitting the group and the dogs per room.

A note about facilities is that New York State’s guidelines clearly outline what the state considers to be “best practices” when holding such events:

“Facilities should prioritize infection prevention and disease control [...] Facilities should devise protocols to ensure that the designed area meets those standards before and after each visit. In addition, facilities should request that participants wash their hands before and after each visit” (5).

It is important that we emphasize cleanliness in the space itself and for all members involved, not only to act in accordance with these guidelines, but also because we are operating in a hospital setting. For example, it can be easier to spread germs and/or catch illness when there exist many different types in the hospital. We must be vigilant in ensuring the dayrooms we use are clean when we enter and cleaner when we leave, and ensure our participants are also following the best health practices. This way, we can protect our staff members, therapy dogs, and participants, and ensure our weekly sessions have no unintended, health-hazardous consequences.

## 6. Qualifications of Personnel

The personnel required for this project fall into two categories: the therapy dog handlers and program organizers. In particular, we will need to hire liaison that is “responsible for the coordination of services between facility and therapy dog organization,” as required by New York State guidelines (5). The criteria for both positions are described below derived from our own expectations of staff members and the qualifications outlined by New York State. It is important to note that there is not currently anyone at the hospital who can file these roles. To find volunteers who meet our expectations, we will advertise these positions via flyers posted around the hospital and sent via work emails. Such advertisements will describe the program, the list the main responsibilities of both positions (outlined below), and include a way for a potential volunteer to contact us. We will conduct interviews with all those who apply.

### 6.1 Therapy Dog Handler

Volunteers who wish to be therapy dog handlers must be able to properly take care of their assigned therapy dogs: in addition to ensuring the dog’s health, safety, and comfort at home, the handler must also be able to main the dog’s training and skills. Thus, experience and familiarity with dogs—in particular, previous training and/or directly working with dogs—is desirable. Moreover, the handler must also be able to ensure “appropriate interactions between the client interactions and the animal,” thus promoting a comfortable environment for both the dog and attendees (2). We want a handler that is able to understand the needs of both parties and act accordingly. Furthermore, it is also important that our handler is comfortable around and working with others; it is suggested that a handler have the ability to exercise “conversational best practices” and utilize “strategies for establishing rapport” when working with our attendees, to again ensure a comfortable and welcoming environment.

These requirements, as well as certain others required by New York State (e.g. “Ensuring that the animal is not made to experience undue stress”; “Enforcing any application confidentiality requirements”; “Approaching strategies to ensure client consent”) will be included on our flyer, as will the notice of a necessary background check (2). This background check is required by Alliance of Therapy Dogs to get the dog certified and will help us ensure that we are aware of any potential risks of the people with whom we are working. Of course, the handler must also have weekly availability to attend our sessions.

An ideal candidate is one who fulfills our requirements and those imposed by the state, and our flyer will comprehensively list them, such that those applying are aware of our expectations.





Figure 6: Therapy dog on handler's leash. Source: "Service Dog and Therapy Dog Work." Elk Creek Yorkies, Weebly, [www.elkcreekyorkies.com/about.html](http://www.elkcreekyorkies.com/about.html). Accessed 10 Dec. 2024.

## 6.2 Program Liaison

The program liaison will act as the main point of communication between our program and hospital staff. A volunteer that wishes to apply for this role must be able to effectively facilitate such communication. For example, one of their main priorities will be scheduling: it is their responsibility to communicate with the hospital's event coordinators to find us an appropriate setting (see previous section). Essentially, our liaison must be able to handle situations in which we need to involve hospital staff members not directly involved with our program. As such, strong communication skills are preferable and those who have previous experience in event coordination are desirable. We will include these requires on our flyer to entice potential liaisons to apply.

## 7. Budget

We request \$2700 from the Lacey Family Foundation to cover the expenses of adopting, training, and certifying our first therapy dog. A breakdown of our budget is featured in the chart on the following page.

<b>Portion of the Budget</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Adoption	\$240
Alliance of Therapy Dogs registration fee	\$15
Background check on handler	\$20
Alliance of Therapy Dogs yearly membership fee	\$30
Training	\$2000
Vet examination	\$42
Fecal exam	\$59
Additional expenses for the dog (food, toys, , etc.)*	\$294
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2700</b>

*Figure 7: A table itemizing our budget's distribution.*

\*In accordance with NY department of Agriculture and Markets, we must ensure that our handler can provide our therapy dog with warm comfort and care at all times (1). This will require the acquisition of dog food and toys, collar and leash, and other necessities to properly take care of a dog.

## 8. Summary

If the Lacey Family Foundation wishes to fund *Paws for Wellness*, they will be contributing to the physical, mental, and emotional health of patients, their loved ones, and hospital staff, at Putnam Hospital Center. Through the funding of this program, you will be supporting us to create a lasting, impactful form of complementary care, and necessarily help us promote the awareness and education of animal-assisted therapy. This program is an accessible resource to many and allows patients to discover and experience animal-assisted therapy for themselves, while bringing some joy to their time spent at the hospital. Furthermore, you will also help us give forever homes to the shelter dogs at the Putnam Humane Society, allowing them to bring and receive happiness and love from others.

There are many patients undergoing treatment at Putnam Hospital Center and more often than not, people enjoy seeing dogs and enjoy seeing therapy dogs even more. Allowing us to bring some happiness to these patients, who may be experiencing their own stressors and worries, will mean the world to them and to us. Will you help us touch the lives of the many individuals at Putnam Hospital Center?

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