



HAPPY TOGETHER

AVOW RECENTLY LAUNCHED ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH
PET PEACE OF MIND®, A NATIONAL PET CARE PROGRAM
FOR HOSPICE PATIENTS.

By Tess Lopez

The fact that dogs are usually referred to as man's (or woman's) best friend says everything we need to know about the influence of a pet. Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the bond between people and their pets reduces stress levels and tapers loneliness. For owners entering hospice care, this bond is even more critical.

Before the national end-of-life pet care support network, Pet Peace of Mind®, was founded, owners who grew too weak to care for their pets risked losing that companionship, especially when no family members were available to step in. But now, the organization has partnered with hospices and home health care groups across the nation, including Avow, to keep patients and their pets together throughout the entire end-of-life transition.

"Patients have a lot of anxiety around their pet's wellbeing; our goal is to end that anxiety," says Dianne McGill, the national president of Pet Peace of Mind®. Trained volunteers perform everyday pet-related duties for hospice



A group graduating from volunteer training for the Pet Peace of Mind® network at Avow. "Patients have a lot of anxiety around their pet's wellbeing; our goal is to end that anxiety," says Dianne McGill, the national president of Pet Peace of Mind®.

patients, including transportation to veterinary or grooming appointments; walking the pet; or smaller, strenuous tasks like changing the litter box. This relieves owners of difficult responsibilities they can no longer manage, while still allowing them to enjoy the companionship of their pet.

McGill founded the organization in 2009 after learning of a Florida woman in hospice who was told that the "two cats that she loved more than anything" needed to be rehomed. The woman's friend called all over the country to find a group that could intervene. There were no organizations to fill the need.

As the executive director and CEO of another animal welfare organization at the time, McGill investigated forming a nonprofit dedicated to keeping patients and pets together as long as possible. With input from a group of hospices around the country, she formed Pet Peace of Mind®, designing the program for hospitals, hospices and home health organizations to run independently to protect patient privacy and provide on-demand service.

"There was a lot of pushback when it started," McGill recalls. "It was not an organic part of what they did for patient care. (But now)

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— Dr. Lesli Reiff,

Pet Peace of Mind® volunteer



tion of the program and advises the volunteers on their interactions with the pets, including the first meeting, which is key to determining a volunteer’s fit with that particular animal.

She instructs volunteers to introduce themselves to the pet as they would a human: cautiously and respectfully. If the meeting bodes well, the volunteer is assigned to the pet. “Having the same volunteer interact with the same patient’s pet regularly provides the familiarity that allows the relationship to be the most effective,” Reiff says.

Avow is accepting volunteer applications for the program. “The only thing we truly look for is someone who has a compassionate heart for what we do here at Avow,” Mercy says.

Please contact:
volunteerservices@avowcares.org
or call
(239) 261-4404
*for more information on Avow’s
volunteer opportunities.*

it’s gone from, ‘If we have to, we will,’ to ‘Where do we sign up?’”

Avow adopted the latter viewpoint, signing on as a partner hospice in 2020 and rolling out the program this past July. Wotts Mercy, Avow’s lead volunteer coordinator for Pet Peace of Mind®, notes that the hospice is making sure patient families are educated on the scope of the program. “The time span can be as short as possible or as long as needed,” she explains.

The duration and care are customized to the patient’s specific situation and based on referrals from nurses and social workers. “We will contact the family member and do further vetting to see if (the need) is appropriate for our service,” Mercy says.

Avow then deploys a suitable volunteer—who has undergone background checks, fingerprinting and vaccinations—to meet with the patient and pet.

Local veterinarian Lesli Reiff guides Avow in its implementa-

