

## Pet Therapy For Hospital Employee Stress



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A number of hospitals have long used therapy dogs to help their patients. Now, even emergency room doctors and nurses themselves have turned to pets to help relieve the stress from their daily work.

At the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, ER physicians and nurses forego their sandwiches during their lunch hour in order to have "puppy" time with animals brought in by the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), according to an *ABC News* report.

The hospital's "Pet a Pooch" programme was launched this summer, spearheaded by Heather Matthew, MSN, a clinical nurse specialist in the emergency department, who revealed that the only time she could unwind after a long day was when she returned home to her bulldog Annabelle.

"Healthcare is an incredibly stressful field from the medical intensive care to the emergency room to the newborn nursery. It's stressful," Matthew told *ABC News*.

Thus, Matthew worked with the hospital's HUPs Pups therapy dog programme for patients to have the SPCA bring the animals directly to staff.

"I've had people say to me, 'I walked in here with the worst headache and I instantly feel better.' And then they go out and they then go on to provide even better care for their patients," Matthew narrated.

### Pets for Adoption

In addition to giving doctors and other medical staff a much-needed break from the daily work stresses, the programme also seeks to find forever homes for the puppies and kittens up for adoption.

With support from Victoria L. Rich, PhD, chief nurse executive, AnnMarie Papa, DNP, clinical director of Emergency Nursing, and the SPCA, the project has grown to a regular event at HUP, according to *PennMedicine*.

The programme is among the first in the USA to use animals to relieve employee stress, said the *PennMedicine* report. Pet a Pooch has been such a success at HUP that Matthew said she would like to promote the programme to other hospitals around the country.

"Basically, when you take that five-minute break out of your day, the pick-me-up that makes all the difference," Matthew said in the *PennMedicine* article. "That animal isn't judging you, they don't know that maybe you've had to give a family some bad news and your heart is breaking over it."

There are also many medical benefits to having a pet as well, Matthew added.

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