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Communications Department
Tel: 01225 82 5849/5799/6230/1299communication@ruh.nhs.uk
www.ruh.nhs.uk**Media Release****Dogs are not just for Christmas**

A warm, cuddly volunteer, with a cold wet nose and a furry coat is providing comfort and joy to patients on the Older People's Unit at the Royal United Hospital.

Petal, a two-year old terrier is bringing a great deal of pleasure to patients. They are thoroughly enjoying chatting to her and giving her a cuddle.

Petal is a Pets as Therapy, or PAT, dog owned by Minnie Dumas. Pets as Therapy (PAT) is a national charity founded in 1983. Volunteers from the charity take friendly, temperament tested and vaccinated dogs into hospitals and other organisations for therapeutic visits, offering temporary, but regular animal companionship and comfort to patients.

Francesca Thompson, Director of Nursing at the RUH, says: "The PAT dog is one of a number of initiatives that we are actively encouraging, to improve the experience of patients on the Older Peoples' Unit. Pets always bring a sense of enormous comfort to us human beings and especially at times when feeling unwell or vulnerable."

Sick patients often feel isolated and even the most withdrawn seem to open up and let the barriers down when the PATdog visits. The dogs bring everyday life closer and with it all the happy associations for them of home comforts. The constant companionship of an undemanding animal, that gives unconditional love, is often one of the most missed aspects of their lives. Pets AsTherapy was formed to help make this loss more bearable and speed recovery, giving a much needed extra boost in addition to medical skills and nursing care.

Dr Chris Dyer, Consultant Geriatrician and Clinical Lead on the Older People's Unit says: "It's wonderful to see the eyes of our patient's light up when they meet Petal. We see the therapeutic benefits that Petal has had upon their well-being long after the PAT dog has gone."

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