



THERAPY



dogs

deliver comfort and joy

T

he excitement starts in the morning as nurses greet and tend to their patients in the oncology unit. “The therapy dogs are coming in today, would you like them to stop in your room for a visit?” a nurse asks a woman who is in the hospital for a few days after a surgery.

“Absolutely!” she smiles. The nurse smiles back and makes a note of it. A few hours later, Suni Cookson and her specially trained and certified Labrador retriever, Truman, arrive to visit the patients who requested time with the dogs. They’re accompanied by fellow volunteer Janie Prentiss and her stately English setter, Roscoe. The therapy dog teams are part of the exciting new therapy dog program at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center Torrance.

The hospital is partnering with the local South Bay nonprofit, Love On 4 Paws. Led by Cookson, a resident of Rancho Palos Verdes, the organization recruits, mentors and certifies therapy dog teams that volunteer bringing comfort and happiness to patients in several facilities in Los Angeles

County. Our hospital is their first in the South Bay. “Therapy dogs are trained extensively to be stable and calm despite the unusual situations they encounter in hospital settings,” Cookson explained. “Both the human handler and the dog go through a certification process. The dogs are immaculately groomed and special hygiene protocols are followed.”

Launched in February 2009, the program currently visits patients in the oncology unit with additional areas of the hospital planned for the future. “We’ve been delighted with the initial response to the program,” said Director of Volunteers Jill Schultz. “Both the staff and the patients get a big emotional lift from the therapy dog visits, and we’re looking forward to expanding the program.”

“Therapy dogs have long been used to brighten the spirits of both children and adults in medical settings,” explained Chief Executive Michael Hunn. “Here at our Medical Center it is one more valuable and compassionate tool we use to treat the whole human being – healing the

mind, body and spirit.”

Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center San Pedro hopes to be able to work with Love On 4 Paws as well, to bring the program to patients in San Pedro. For more information on Love On 4 Paws or how to become a volunteer therapy dog team, please visit www.loveon4paws.com.

