

While working at a rehabilitation hospital in Dallas and using the AAT method, Shari felt that a more cohesive approach that would optimize the care and safety for all involved was needed. Therapet was established to address those concerns. As a result, there are very strict guidelines and goals that include certification of all animals used in the program. As part of this process, the certifying organization should provide educational classes that are mandatory for owners and pets to attend. Liability insurance for participants should be included in the initial registration.

Additional goals of Therapet are: to provide standards of practice which include education, training, and certification of health care professionals who provide Animal Assisted Therapy, teaching standards of animal evaluation which adequately test the animal's reaction to stress that will ensure the safety of patients in AAT programs, assisting institutions in establishing AAT programs, with education, training, and equipment selection, and supporting research efforts in this growing field.

There are a host of facilities and organizations that benefit from Therapet's services. These include Acute Care Hospitals, Rehabilitation Hospitals, Hospice, Psychiatric Facilities, Nursing Homes, Psychiatric Prison Facility, and Pediatric Facilities. In addition, Therapet volunteers participate in a variety of special events throughout the community. During the school year therapy dogs and their owners also visit elementary schools teaching children about responsible dog ownership and how animals help people with special needs.

Shari serves as Therapet's Executive Director and also currently manages the Animal Assisted Therapy programs at

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital and Trinity Mother Frances Hospital in Tyler, as well as the program in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Skyview Unit, a psychiatric hospital located in Rusk. She has conducted numerous seminars on Animal Assisted Therapy nationwide, presented at national and statewide medical meetings and was recognized by *Town and Country Magazine* as the national leader in animal assisted therapy. She is the author of *Animal Assisted Therapy: A Guide to Health Care Professionals and Volunteers*.

Kevin Curran, MD. is the Medical Director of Therapet. He is a Nephrologist and brings his wide experience of disease and infection control knowledge to strengthen the existing procedures and policies recommended by Therapet. He has been instrumental in standardizing policies relating to human-animal health screening of zoonotic diseases. Dr. Curran's involvement with Animal Assisted Therapy began in 1994 when he and his Bernese mountain dog, Rev, began volunteering.

Therapet Animal Assisted Therapy Foundation is available to provide one and two day seminars on establishing and maintaining Animal Assisted Therapy or Visitation Programs. These comprehensive programs provide continuing education credits (CEU's) for Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Speech Therapists, Nursing and Therapeutic Recreation Therapists. It is a non-profit organization that relies on the generosity of donors, who have the same goal -- to assist in the healing of people -- for funding. For more information: Therapet Animal Assisted Therapy Foundation, P. O. Box 698, Troup, TX 75789 or e-mail: Therapet@juno.com.