

Assignment: Shadow a Group Visit

Observe ComForT dogs and handlers on an actual group visit

We will discuss your observations in a future class.

The group visit actually begins 10-15 minutes PRIOR TO entering the facility. Dogs are extremely social creatures and have very defined greeting rituals. For this reason, teams should arrive early and dog greetings should take place OUTSIDE where there is plenty of space.

Dogs must also be given the opportunity to eliminate before going inside. If a dog defecates outside the facility, we use a plastic bag and pick up the “offending” material. We want to leave a good impression, not a “present.”

Watch the dog greetings and see how handlers control their dogs. [If a team happens to arrive late and misses the outside greeting, note the effect this has on that particular dog and on the other dogs when the latecomer joins a visit already in progress.]

During the visit, watch for the following:

- 1) Proximity of handler to dog
- 2) Control of handler over dog
- 3) Commands and cues given to dog
- 4) Negotiation of teams down hallways, around facility equipment, around staff
- 5) Proximity of dogs to each other, and what happens if they get too close
- 6) Use of food treats
- 7) Use of special behaviors (tricks) or special features of the breed
- 8) Approach, posture and contact of team as they interact with each resident.
- 9) Listen to the conversations between handlers and residents.

Watch how handlers of different size dogs facilitate interaction of their dog with each resident. This will vary depending on equipment used by resident (e.g. wheelchair, walker, regular chair or couch, etc).

Watch how handlers interact with multiple residents simultaneously versus one-on-one encounters.

Every encounter of a team with a resident includes recognizable elements – i.e. a beginning, a conversation, and a closing. This is true even if the interaction lasts only a minute. Look for these elements.