

Hospital patients and visitors have a lot to cope with—pain, anxiety, frustration, loneliness. And when you're hurting, it can be hard to think positively. Or, as they say at Intermountain Therapy Animals: paws-itively.

Since the nonprofit organization's Pet Partner® teams began working their healing magic at University of Utah Hospitals & Clinics seven years ago, patients' spirits have lifted and their blood pressures have dropped. Pet-assisted therapy, it seems, is just what the doctor ordered.

University Hospital and the U of U Neuropsychiatric Institute are among 70 facilities along the Wasatch Front—nursing homes, substance abuse treatment centers, programs for emotionally and physically abused children and developmentally disabled adults, schools and libraries—visited by some 180 Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA) teams. At the hospital, ITA human handlers and their sidekicks—primarily dogs, but a small cast of cats, two birds, one bunny and a guinea pig—make regular rounds of the rehabilitation center, psychiatric units, surgery waiting room and pediatric clinic. At the request of patients and families, the four-footed therapists also make room calls.

# Absolutely, PAWS-itively Healing

*On Thursdays, Kiyoshi, an Akita, rounds in University Hospital patient rooms and staffs the surgery waiting room with Pet Partner® Kathy McNulty. Conversation with Kiyoshi makes the time pass faster for LeAnn Hansen, Kearns, Utah (below left), who's waiting for word about a friend in the operating room, and Sahen Skinner, Afton, Wyo. (below right), whose mom, Anona, is having knee surgery. Kiyoshi and the other Intermountain Therapy Animals must pass a rigorous test to show that their behavior is predictable and that they're comfortable with the unpredictable. Including the occasional game of leapfrog gone awry.*



*Text by ANNE BRILLINGER  
Photos by BRAD NELSON*