SECTION 14

PETS IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

• Introduction
• Responsibilities
• Infection Prevention and Control Precautions
Introduction
Pets in healthcare settings can often enhance the quality of life for the ageing and the ill. However, there may be concerns that a resident/client may catch an infection from a pet, especially if the resident’s/clients immunity is reduced through age or illness.

Domestic cats, dogs and other types of pets, although apparently healthy can act as carriers of enteric pathogens such as Salmonella and Campylobacter. Sensible precautions as outlined below can minimise risks associated with pets in healthcare.

Responsibilities
The Person in Charge of the Service should ensure that for all pets both visiting and resident:

- A knowledgeable person is responsible for the animal and that there is a record of up to date vaccinations.
- There is a written agreement within the facility to ensure full understanding of the types of animals allowed for the purpose of pet therapy- only mature house trained pets are acceptable.
- The specific areas within the healthcare setting where animals are permitted and the areas from where they are excluded are documented.
- Visiting and resident animals are not allowed within an affected ward/area during an outbreak of infection e.g. Norovirus.

Infection Prevention and Control Precautions
Where an animal has been assessed as suitable and is to be kept by a healthcare setting the following infection control advice must be adhered to:

- Hand hygiene is essential for residents/clients and staff after any animal contact.
- Pets should be under the regular care of a veterinarian, appropriately immunised from disease with records of inoculation and follow up as required. Dogs must be wormed regularly.
- Pets should be groomed regularly and checked for signs of infection or illness.
- If pets display signs of illness they must be treated by a vet and not allowed to enter the healthcare setting or work with residents/clients.
- If pets are to be kept near a healthcare setting a suitable clean living environment external to the healthcare setting must be provided.
- Pets must be excluded from
  - treatment rooms,
  - storage areas for equipment and clean/sterile supplies,
  - food storage and preparation areas i.e. kitchens and kitchenettes.
• areas where food is being served i.e. dining room, or day room during meal time
• laundries/linen rooms,
• Resident/client care areas
  o if a resident/client is on Transmission Based Precautions, or
  o during an outbreak of infection.

• Establish a policy for regular cleaning of pet living quarters.

• Floor surfaces used by pets and pet feeding areas should be regularly cleaned.

• Pet feeding utensils should be designated for pets’ sole use and only proprietary pet food should be used. Feeding utensils and the area where the pet is fed should be cleaned daily and as required.

• Hands must be washed after handling pets, pet cages, pet feeding utensils or other pet objects.

• Spills from pets such as faeces, urine and vomit should be cleaned immediately and disinfected as per blood/body fluid spills.

• Never deal with a cats litter box if you are pregnant.

Residents/clients and staff must always wash hands thoroughly after contact with pets.

References and Bibliography

