



Ottawa Therapy Dogs

Sheet #1:

Working with Stroke Survivors

Stroke Facts

A stroke is caused when blood flow to the brain is disrupted. Without essential oxygen and nutrients, permanent brain injury often results.

- ✦ Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada.
- ✦ Each year, between 40,000 and 50,000 Canadians have a stroke.
- ✦ Among the survivors, 75% will experience some degree of disability.
- ✦ It is estimated that about 3,500 people in the Ottawa area are directly affected by stroke.

What Disabilities Result from a Stroke?

Depending on the nature and severity of the stroke, disabilities can include:

1. Paralysis or weakness on one side of the body - it may affect walking and other activities.
2. Swallowing – it may be difficult for the person to eat regular food or drink regular liquids, even water.
3. Communication – there may be difficulties with auditory comprehension, speech, reading, writing and numbers. "Aphasia" is a language disturbance that can range from mild to severe, and usually includes some problems in finding or using words.
4. Visual – a visual field cut can cause the person to miss information on the left or right. (Glasses cannot fix this problem.)
5. Fatigue – after a stroke, people tire more easily and lack endurance.
6. Perceptual Changes – it may be difficult to recognize and use common objects such as a cup, pen or leash.
7. Changes in Personality – the person may talk too much or too little; be impulsive and react quickly, without thinking; cry more easily, for no apparent reason; or may have extreme mood swings.

8. Memory – a person may forget easily or have difficulty learning and retaining new information such as your name or your dog's.

IMPORTANT! OTD teams who work with stroke survivors should always have close supervision and support from a health care provider (e.g. a nurse, a recreation therapist).

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Activities (AAA)

OTD teams working as part of a stroke rehabilitation team can assist therapists in helping patients walk (e.g. with double leashes), use arms and hands (e.g. throwing balls), and communicate more effectively (e.g. talking about their own pet).

Check ahead of time to ensure you and your dog are welcome. Share your ideas with the therapists and ask about their goals. This way, you will discover creative ways to make therapy more fun and rewarding for everyone — most importantly, for your patient!

Be mindful of your safety and that of your dog at all times. Keep your visits short. If communication is an issue, be honest if you don't understand but give the person time to talk or communicate non-verbally. Never offer food or beverages, including water, to a patient.

For more information on stroke, check these useful web sites:

1. Heart and Stroke Foundation at www.hsf.ca
2. Aphasia Centre of Ottawa at www.aphasiaottawa.com
3. Stroke Survivors Association of Ottawa at www.strokesurvivors.ca/

Prepared by Julianne Labreche, S-LP(C) Reg. CASLPO
Speech-Language Pathologist
Associate Member, OTD

Good dogs doing great work!



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Suite 750, 1500 Bank St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1H 1B8

613.261.6834
info@OttawaTherapyDogs.ca

ottawatherapydogs.ca