

Media Contact: Kelli Hanley
E-mail: kelli.hanley@cshs.org
Telephone: 1-310-423-3674

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CANINE CANCER SURVIVOR REPORTS FOR DUTY AS A VOLUNTEER IN CEDARS-SINAI MEDICAL CENTER'S PET VISITATION PROGRAM

LOS ANGELES (January 5, 2005) – As his name implies, Henry Arthur Cole is no ordinary dog. It's not just that he dutifully volunteers as part of the pet visitation program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, or that he has lifted the spirits of countless patients, visitors and staff at the hospital for the last five years. No, what sets Henry apart is the fact that he now continues his volunteer work as a cancer survivor, faithfully visiting numerous patients and their family members every other week when he and his owner, Adrienne Cole, don their turquoise colored uniforms and report for duty.

Seven-year-old Henry, a 75-pound Golden Retriever, began "volunteering" at the hospital when Adrienne found out that Cedars-Sinai had a volunteer pet visitation program for patients called POOCH. Henry's calm and happy disposition made him perfect for the job, as he is not bothered by all the activity and will enter the room of any patient no matter how sick, who needs cheering-up. But little more than four years into his duties, Henry was to experience what so many patients know all too well – cancer.

In June 2004, Adrienne felt a little swelling in Henry's neck just prior to his usual veterinary check up. Her vet put him on an antibiotic and took a blood test to check for anything suspicious. But the blood test came back abnormal and Henry had to undergo a biopsy, which showed that he was positive for lymphoma. Henry was immediately started on weekly to bi-weekly infusions of chemotherapy.

"Henry has been really lucky, he's experienced very few side effects beyond throwing up once and losing some of his fur," said Adrienne. "Because he's done so well, he hasn't needed to take a break from his volunteer work even though he's still getting chemotherapy."

Now in remission, Henry is one of 45 dogs who volunteer with Cedars-Sinai's POOCH program, along with their human owners. POOCH, which stands for *Pets Offer Ongoing Care and Healing*, was first developed in the Rehabilitation Unit at Cedars-Sinai in 1992. In 1995, Barbara Cowen, L.C.S.W., introduced the program in the HIV/AIDS unit and it expanded to both the medical and surgical cardiology units. By 2000, child-life specialists at Cedars-Sinai were using the POOCH volunteers in the pediatric unit as well.

"I know how calming it is for me to be around an animal and felt that visits from the dogs would really benefit our AIDS patients. It's so wonderful for patients to have that unconditional love and affection," said Barbara Cowen, a volunteer coordinator at Cedars-Sinai. "It is well documented in the literature how unconditional love and affection can lessen a patient's fears and loneliness, which are feelings often associated with hospitalization. The animals are non-threatening and non-judgmental – and we've seen patients with slower heart beats and lowered blood pressure after a visit."

Before a prospective canine volunteer can actually join the POOCH program, the dog is carefully screened by veterinarian, John Young, V.M.D, M.S., Director of Comparative Medicine at Cedars-Sinai, who

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evaluates not only the dog's health, but also their behavior to determine how well she or he interacts with patients and hospital staff.

“It takes special dogs to be canine volunteers. They need to have the right personality, be very outgoing to strangers and be quite stoic in a sometimes, hectic environment. It also takes selfless owners because they rarely get as much recognition from the patients and staff as the dogs do,” said Dr. Young.

Once a dog becomes a volunteer, they must be on a flea control program and have a bath within 24 hours of coming to the hospital. They must also have a fecal analysis every six months to make sure that they don't have any parasites or bacteria that could contaminate anything in the hospital.

With Adrienne at his side, Henry has become an encouragement to many of the patients with cancer that he visits at the hospital. Adrienne recalls one young gentleman with lymphoma who was so sick that he couldn't speak very well. “But when I told him that Henry also had lymphoma, he was very touched and tears started streaming down his face. We were able to just sit with him and let him express his grief,” she said.

On another patient visit, Adrienne says that a man with lymphoma shed his self-consciousness and took off his knit cap to show her and Henry where his hair had started growing back only after she had shown him where Henry had lost some fur around his tail from the chemotherapy.

But unlike many cancer patients who are in remission, Henry will undergo weekly chemotherapy treatments for the rest of his life – and even though he's now in remission and doing very well, he's not completely out of the woods.

“We've been told that his cancer could come back and the doctors don't really know what his prognosis will be,” said Adrienne. “The good news is that Henry doesn't even know that he is sick and his bout with cancer seems only to have encouraged patients all the more because they can identify with him.”

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One of only four hospitals in California whose nurses have been honored with the prestigious Magnet designation, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest non-profit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For 17 consecutive years, it has been named Los Angeles' most preferred hospital for all health needs in an independent survey of area residents. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthroughs in biomedical research and superlative medical education. It ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities and was recently fully accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP). Additional information is available at: www.csmc.edu.

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