



PRESS RELEASE

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Pet Therapy for Mental Health Patients

The Gibraltar Health Authority has introduced 'Pet Therapy' for patients at Ocean Views Mental Health Facility.

The service, named 'Pawsitive Pet Activities', is currently offered to certain in-patients at the Sunshine Ward on a weekly basis, with a view of expanding it throughout other areas in Ocean Views in the future. 'Pawsitive Pet Activities' offers patients the chance to get involved in activities with Ant and Dec, two Chihuahuas. The Chihuahua is a tiny but confident dog, that loves giving and receiving attention, they have a unique personality and tend to be affectionate, loyal and good companions. Mrs Annette and Mr Roy Button, Ant and Dec's owners, approached the GHA to offer their services free of any charge.

Pet therapy builds on the pre-existing human-animal bond. Interacting with a friendly pet can help persons with many physical and mental issues. Studies have found it can release endorphins that produce a calming effect, helping alleviate pain, reduce stress, and improve your overall psychological state. The aim of pet therapy programs, include increasing individual's self-esteem, verbal communication and willingness to join in activities, as well as developing their social skills. The therapy may also be beneficial to residents in long-term care facilities. They visit Ocean Views once a week.

Mrs Kay Rajkumar, Clinical Nurse Manager for Ocean View said: "Since the initial introduction of Pawsitive Pet Activities, nursing staff have seen the benefits in both social interaction and the emotional wellbeing of our elderly patient group. Seeing this patient group interacting and communicating with each other on memories, that come flooding back for times they had previously owned or cared for a pet is heart-warming and rewarding to see. The reduction of anxieties, the care that patients take in order to hold, pet and interact with Ant and Dec is wonderful."

Minister for Health, Care and Justice had the chance to see patients enjoy spending some time with Ant and Dec during a recent visit to Ocean Views, he added: "It was great to see the patients interacting with Ant and Dec and really enjoying their company. I am very glad to note that staff have already witnessed the positive impact that the visits and activities have had on our patients. I would like to sincerely thank Mr and Mrs Button for their kindness and generosity in providing this popular and welcome service."

Ministry of Health, Care and Justice

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