



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jamie Baxter
775.322.4022

jamie@theimpetusagency.com

New Research to Study Impact of Therapy Dogs on Easing Child Anxiety in the Emergency Room

Human Animal Bond Research Institute and Pet Partners Award Grant to Indiana University

(Washington, D.C.) December 7, 2020 – The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) and Pet Partners announced today a grant to Indiana University School of Medicine for a new research project, *Canine-assisted anxiety reduction in pediatric emergency care (CANINE III)*. The study will investigate the impact of therapy dog visits on the anxiety levels of children in emergency care.

“Registered Pet Partners therapy dog teams visit hospitals throughout the country, and we know they can put a smile on a child’s face, no matter what they are going through,” said C. Annie Peters, President and CEO of Pet Partners. “Scientific research to validate the efficacy of therapy dogs in the emergency room has the potential to not only provide more children with much needed comfort and emotional support, but to also help serve as a complementary intervention to improve medical outcomes.”

“Virtually all children experience some degree of psychological stress as patients in the emergency department,” says the Principal Investigator, Jeffrey Kline, MD, IU School of Medicine “The inclusion of therapy dog visits in addition to a child-life specialist could provide a low cost, low risk method to help reduce child and parental anxiety in the emergency department.”

CANINE III is a NCT-registered, two-arm, block randomized trial with one to one matching of patients receiving therapy dogs as an adjunct with a child life specialist, compared with children who receive child life specialists alone. The children will receive a 15-minute visit, with the research team periodically collecting saliva samples to test for cortisol levels, or the level of stress. Dr. Kline will complete this project alongside co-investigator Alan Beck, PhD, Purdue University. The study will also test if therapy dogs afford greater anxiety reduction in children with psychiatric complaints, autism spectrum disorder, or brain injury, versus children with none of those conditions.

All study participants will be recruited from Riley Hospital for Children at Indiana University Health. Child participants will range from 5-17 years of age and have “moderate or greater anxiety” as reported by the parent or guardian. Parents of the child participants will also be tested for their anxiety levels before, during, and after the study to determine if the therapy dogs can also reduce anxiety in this population.

“One of the absolute unique and paradigm-changing aspects of this work is that dogs bring the dimensions of affection and unconditional caring to children and families during times of perceived emergency,” said Dr. Kline. “This objective is important because anxiety, stress, and ‘threat perceptions’ are major negative modifiers of the emergency department experience in adults and children.”

“HABRI is proud to be supporting research on the benefits of therapy dogs for children in the emergency room, which represents an important area of research,” said HABRI Executive Director Steven Feldman. “HABRI is grateful for the support of Pet Partners for this project, which we hope will provide further evidence of the complementary role of therapy dogs in human healthcare settings.”

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent precautions in place at the Riley Children’s Hospital, the start of this project is currently on hold. The project will commence once in-person visitation is deemed safe and permitted.

About Pet Partners

Pet Partners is the national leader in demonstrating and promoting the health and wellness benefits of animal-assisted interventions. Since the organization’s inception in 1977, the science proving these benefits has become indisputable. With more than 13,000 registered teams making more than 3 million visits annually, Pet Partners serves as the nation’s most prestigious nonprofit registering handlers of multiple species as volunteer teams. Pet Partners teams visit with patients in recovery, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors living with Alzheimer’s, students, veterans with PTSD, and those approaching end of life, improving human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. With the recent release of its *Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Interventions* and international expansion, Pet Partners is globally recognized as the industry gold standard. For more information, visit www.petpartners.org.

About HABRI

HABRI is a not-for-profit organization that maintains the world’s largest online library of human-animal bond research and information; funds innovative research projects to scientifically document the health benefits of companion animals; and informs the public about human-animal bond research and the beneficial role of companion animals in society. For more information, please visit www.habri.org.

###