



the hospice therapy



There's a very special worker at the Samaritan Evergreen Hospice House: JJ, a certified pet therapy dog. JJ comforts patients and families in emotionally difficult times, providing a calming presence that reaches beyond the need for words. With some help from handler Tracy Calhoun, RN, JJ shares what a typical day of service is like:

7 a.m. We arrive at the hospice house and I put my work collar on, complete with my Samaritan badge. I start my day by spending time with the night shift staff, making sure they feel loved before their work day is done.

8 a.m. I do my own rounds, going room to room to check on patients and families. If I haven't met them before, I wait politely for permission before I enter, though I do like to poke my head in the room to announce myself.

9 a.m. The rest of the hospice staff arrives to start their day. It's important for me to check in with all of my work people, but I'll be honest: I usually will start with those who have treats at their desks! I take a few minutes to play chase with Marfa, our other therapy dog.

10 a.m. I can sense that someone in the office is stressed out, so I'm off to help. Sometimes I have time to put on my super therapy dog cape, but not always. So often I am asked, "JJ, how did you know I'm having a bad day?"

11:30 a.m. Mealtime! I have taken on the very important job of customer relations — it never hurts to put on my cute, hungry face!



1 p.m. We sit with someone who is dying, because his family can't be here. I take it upon myself to do a "paws up" (even though I'm supposed to be directed) and try to get him to pet me. Then I lick his hand to comfort him and let him know he isn't alone.



2:30 p.m. Family members arrive, and they are sad and tearful. I am very sensitive to sad feelings, so I spend a lot of time with them. I'm able to give some kisses when needed, as well as distract the kids with my toys and tummy rubs.

4 p.m. I have spent much of the day as the official greeter of the hospice house. When the door chimes and I hear the door open, I trot to the door with a toy in my mouth to say hello. Visitors seem to be quite charmed by this, and I try to point out the treat jar as they pass.



6 p.m. The day is winding down, but I am needed in a room with a very sweet lady. She hasn't been talking much for a few days, and apparently she has a memory problem. She perked up when she saw me, and then started talking. She had many stories to tell me! I love my job....

8 p.m. We are home at last and ready to relax... it's time to catch up on my sleep and dream of dog bones.

Samaritan Evergreen Hospice is a local, not-for-profit that has served area communities for nearly 30 years. They care for dying patients in their own homes, as well as in the Albany-based hospice house which offers round-the-clock comfort care for the dying. For more information, visit samhealth.org/Hospice or call 1-800-442-1428.