



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Pawsitively Purrfect Therapy

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A rare opportunity is strolling down the halls at Evans Army Community Hospital. So rare in fact, that there are only a few like it in the state of Colorado. If you smell the scent of oranges, see a plush purple stroller and a pair of alien-like eyes staring back at you, smile. You are about to be greeted by the sweater dress-wearing therapy cat named Piglet.

Piglet is a 13-year-old, hairless, lavender sphynx with a wardrobe collection that could make most women jealous.

Owner Debbie Polelli recognized something special about Piglet. She doesn't run from loud noises, strange hands, or new places. Sphynx cats naturally love to cuddle with people. Their soft, warm suede feel makes them the perfect heat pack to cuddle with for some soothing relaxation time. These qualities keep the cat employed as a registered therapy animal with Pet Partners and the American Red Cross.

During a visit to the Family Care Ward in February, Piglet crawled immediately to work as a quick companion for an 18-month-old boy and his 4-year-old brother. Piglet's big eyes met the 4-year-olds' as he curiously checked her over. His mood lightened as he asked about each of the badges that she wears on her vest and Polelli explained them all in simple terms to satisfy the boy's curiosity.

"Is that a dog?" the little boy asked pointing to the picture on the cat's badge.

"That's the cat, Piglet," Polelli smiled back.

Piglet drew more attention to herself as she moved between rooms on her visits.

"She's not just here for the patients but for the staff, too," Polelli explained as a crowd of people surround the plush purple stroller.

"Does she meow? Was she born with hair?" the questions quickly turned in to statements. "She doesn't even have whiskers!"

After the quick morale boost for the staff, it was on to the other side of



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the ward.

"[Piglet] acts more like a dog," a young female patient said as Piglet curled up on her lap. "It would be so nice if everyone in the hospital had one. It's a nice distraction."

Piglet then visited five patients on the Family Care Ward, six on the Mother Baby Ward, a little boy in the Intensive Care Unit, and wrapped up with almost every smiling face waiting in the pharmacy.

Piglet has been working with the American Red Cross since 2011 and is one of ten registered therapy animals at the hospital. The program started in January of 2009, placing strict requirements on their therapy animal teams.

"They have to already be registered with an organization," pet therapy coordinator Amy Sorrels-Mourabit began. "Their handler has to pass background checks and be a fully registered volunteer, and the animals have to get cleared from the veterinarian here on post annually." She paused and smiled, "The main difference between here and other places I've seen therapy animals? Our handlers are required to offer hand sanitizer at the end of the session."

Piglet currently resides with Polelli in Castle Rock after living in the Springs Area for many years. It means visits to Evans Army Community Hospital aren't as frequent, but she's dedicated to her work. Just don't ask Piglet to do it outside.

"She gets sunburned outside!," Polelli recalled, "But in 90 degree heat, Piglet still spent four hours supporting the victims of the Waldo Canyon Fire."

