



Healing at Twilight

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Arthritic dogs and cats will walk with greater ease. Some may even participate in playtime much like they did in their younger years. Wounds will heal. Pain will diminish. Recovery will be accelerated. Animals will become engaged in emotional enrichment and physical exercise to increase their health and fitness levels. It sounds like a fantastical daydream, or how we might imagine the magical restorative place on the other side of the “rainbow bridge.” Instead, it is a dream come true – a specialized miracle-working cottage right here at the Our Companions Animal Sanctuary. Welcome to the Twilight House.

Twilight House, which was named by long-time donor Christine Knuth, is Our Companions’ latest rescue cottage. It was designed specifically for older dogs who may endure physical challenges such as decreased mobility, arthritis and advanced stages of various illnesses. What makes this cottage really special is the added physical rehabilitation wing, made possible by a generous gift from Our Companions Board Member, Valerie Friedman. Senior dogs need only to take a short stroll from their living room, through an adjoining hallway, to reach the full-service therapeutic physical rehabilitation center. Their home and their healing place all under one roof.

At first glance, the rehabilitation center will appear to be a lively indoor playground. However, among the colorful inflatable exercise and balance equipment, and the Oasis Pro Underwater Treadmill, hands-on healing will happen not just for seniors, but all Sanctuary dogs, cats and other small animals. Commonly referred to as “canine rehab,” animal physical rehabilitation rivals that of human



physical therapy for the treatment of orthopedic or neurologic conditions, illness, and injury. Rehabilitation utilizes a variety of therapeutic modalities and exercise routines to relieve pain, reduce inflammation, strengthen muscles, and increase mobility. This comprehensive approach will help animals return to normal function or otherwise improve their quality of life. Physical rehabilitation helps ease symptoms and slow the progression of painful arthritis or other degenerative disorders. Weight management is also an important component addressed during treatment due to the numerous health-related complications associated with obesity, particularly in senior and geriatric animals. Rehabilitation sessions at the Sanctuary will provide a vital outlet for emotional enrichment and maintaining physical exercise.

Patient Evaluations at the Sanctuary

Prior to treatment, a physical rehabilitation specialist will perform a full head-to-tail assessment, identifying abnormalities, as well as areas of pain, spasm, and dysfunction in order to develop an appropriate individualized therapy and exercise program. This evaluation includes gait analysis paired with numerical measurements of both muscle mass and joint range of motion.

All Sanctuary animals, regardless of age or physical condition, will benefit from rehabilitation sessions at Twilight House. Let’s take a closer look at some of the treatment modalities and how each will help.



Therapeutic Exercises

Therapeutic exercises improve strength, balance, flexibility, and proprioception (sense of proper paw placement awareness when walking or standing). Some of the equipment used, either individually or in various combinations, are brightly colored plastic disc cushions and inflatable physio balls in the shape of gigantic peanuts, donuts, eggs, and dog bones. Agility tunnels, ramps, and obstacle courses with Cavaletti rails – hurdles and cones spaced apart with poles placed at various heights – are used to step over, crawl under, or weave in and out of in a slow, controlled manner.

Hydrotherapy

The most exciting piece of equipment at the Rehabilitation Center will be the Oasis Pro Underwater Treadmill. The heated underwater treadmill is a beneficial modality for nearly all conditions, including post-surgical recovery. Therapeutic warm water temperatures generally average between 85 and 90 degrees to help with muscle relaxation, increased mobility and flexibility as well as cardiovascular fitness. Water resistance strengthens muscles, builds endurance, increases range of motion, improves balance and coordination, and aids in weight loss and fitness conditioning. Underwater treadmill belt speed and water level height adjustments can be customized according to the patient’s condition and response. Due to the effects of water



buoyancy, orthopedic, neurologic, and many arthritic patients who are unable to carry their full weight or walk properly on land are often able to move in the treadmill with less pain and pressure on muscles and joints. Neurologic patients may require manual assistance with proper paw placement during the early stages of recovery, then progress to self-controlled movements as they relearn normal walking patterns.

Therapeutic Laser

With its neon-red light beam, wand probe, and black protective goggles required during treatment for both dog and therapist, therapeutic laser sessions look like a scene straight out of a *Star Wars* movie, but laser has long been successfully used on both animals and humans alike with dramatic results. Often referred to as low-level laser, or photo biomodulation, the word LASER is an acronym for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. This form of penetrating light energy has been proven to be safe with no harmful side effects.

Laser is a non-invasive modality that reduces pain, inflammation and swelling, increases circulation, decreases muscle spasm, and stimulates the natural healing process. Laser is also used post-operatively for orthopedic and neurologic disorders to accelerate bone and tissue repair, and improve nerve function. Arthritis, cruciate ligament injury, hip and elbow dysplasia, and degenerative myelopathy, to name a few, are

commonly treated with laser. Additionally, laser therapy promotes healing of wounds, lick granulomas, ear infections, and scar tissue.

Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy

The Rehabilitation Center at Twilight House will also provide Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy for treating pain and inflammation. This technology stimulates the body's natural healing response. Pain, swelling and inflammation are reduced by enhancing the therapeutic properties of nitric oxide in tendons, ligaments, bones, inflamed skin, and internal organs. Animal patients are so relaxed during these treatments that they often fall asleep on the padded therapy mat.

Orthotics, Prosthetics and Adaptive Devices

An assortment of adaptive devices for mobility support such as toe-ups,

Help "Em Up"™ Harnesses, and mobility carts can help improve an animal's quality of life. In addition, the same advanced technology used in orthotic and prosthetic devices for humans is widely available for animals. An orthosis corrects biomechanical alignment of a limb or paw, or protects an injury during recovery. A prosthetic device attaches to the body and completely replaces a missing limb or part. Rehabilitation therapy assists animal patients in adapting to the device, which requires muscle strengthening, coordination, gait training, and neuromuscular re-education.

Our Companions has always been the leader in providing life-saving care for the most vulnerable animals, especially those with special needs. Now, thanks to generous donations from Christine Knuth and Valerie Friedman, the healing power of physical rehabilitation will be realized every single day right on the Sanctuary grounds. Just imagine how many more dogs, cats, and other animals Our Companions will be able to help – with the magic made real at Twilight House.

The author is a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner with more than 39 years' experience in small animal veterinary medicine.



Physical rehabilitation is prescribed to help animals recover from injury, surgery or to improve their quality of life. The following are common conditions that can be treated:

- Pain management
- Post-surgical recovery: orthopedic or neurologic
- Osteoarthritis
- Hip dysplasia
- Elbow dysplasia
- Shoulder disorders
- Patellar luxation
- Back or neck injury
- Tendonitis
- Muscle and ligament injury
- Intervertebral Disk Disease (IVDD)
- Degenerative Myelopathy (DM)
- Vestibular disorders
- Fibrocartilagenous Embolism (FCE)
- Geriatric issues
- Weight management
- Athletic conditioning