

A recent study at Memorial University of Newfoundland demonstrated that friendly dogs have a positive effect on most sick children. An evaluation of pediatric dog visitation programs in 10 children's hospitals across Canada showed that dog visits to hospitalized children produced happier kids, less anxiety and stress, greater compliance with medical regimes, and a reduction in heart rate and blood pressure. Some kids even required less pain medication.

Other research programs indicate that, in the future, dogs may play a much more interventionist role in keeping us healthy. Apparently, some of our canine friends can detect bladder cancer (through scent perception) at an early stage in humans. And in 2005, there were published reports of dogs that are able to help diabetics by detecting dangerous shifts in blood sugar levels. Scientists are currently investigating the abilities of dogs to detect other ailments and abnormalities in humans.

So, we know what humans get out of their relationship with pets, but what's in it for the animals? They are innocent, trusting and vulnerable. They rely on their human companions to feed and house them, to look after their emotional and medical needs, and to protect them from harm. Can we deliver?

Once we accept the responsibility of pet ownership, that responsibility includes making sure our charges are cared for in our absence. Responsible pet owners wouldn't dream of leaving their pets alone for extended periods of time without arranging for someone to look after them. Yet, many pet owners enter long-term medical care facilities, or go to their graves, with no arrangements for the care of their pets. They have nothing written down; they have made no reasonable plans, not even informal ones.

You may be one of the people who think such plans are unnecessary for one or more of the following reasons:

My dog is already quite old, so I will surely outlive her. Some pet owners who died in New York City on September 11, 2001, may have sadly believed the same thing. The fact is, we cannot predict the time

FACTOIDS

- **Cheetahs are easily tamed and can even be taught to play games like fetch.** But they cannot be housebroken; even a wild cheetah will soil its resting place, since it is very mobile and has no true lair. Sportsmen once used them for coursing – hunting by sight, as opposed to scent. Typically, the hooded cheetah was carried on horseback or in a cart. When the hunted animal came near, the hood was removed and the cheetah released. If the cheetah then caught the animal, it was rewarded with some small part of the prey or a dish of blood.