

Rehab Patients Helped By Four-Legged Therapist

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By Julie Henry, Health & Fitness Reporter, NBC17.com

RALEIGH, N.C. – A new canine staff member at WakeMed’s Rehab Hospital is not only putting a smile on patient’s faces, he’s also helping them return to independence.

Scully, a 75 pound black lab/retriever mix, joined the rehab therapy team in March. He and his handler, recreation therapist Elizabeth Penny, work as a team to support other therapists. Scully works three hours a day, five days a week.

“We can increase range of motion, standing and balance, so I can address some of those goals, but use him to help address those goals,” said Penny.

Eight-year-old Zachary Bradsher enjoys playing fetch with Scully, who prefers stuffed animals over balls.

“When we play together, he helps my arms get stronger,” he said.

Zachary has made great progress since being hit by a car in early March. His dad, Troy, says Scully has given them both a relaxing change of pace during Zachary’s lengthy hospitalization.

“I was delighted,” said Troy Bradsher. “It’s another avenue of rehab.”

Like other therapy dogs, Penny says Scully provides an emotional connection for patients, but what sets him apart is his ability to take commands from patients. Giving commands helps them with memory and attention and with speaking and gestures.

Scully is just two years old, but he knows 44 different commands, and can even help with household chores. As his handler, Penny also is the primary caregiver for Scully, and takes him home to her family each night and weekend.

“He can empty a dryer,” said Penny. “He can take clothes out of a dryer, put them in a basket. He can do whatever you train him to do.”

Penny says WakeMed is seeing an increasingly younger rehab population, many of whom will need some kind of assistance when they return to everyday life. Scully was trained by Canine Companions for Independence, which provides highly trained assistance dogs for people with disabilities.