

**Serving Survivors Who Have Service Animals: A Webinar for Forensic Nurses**

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Vera Institute of Justice  
March 20, 2020

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**Objectives**

- Increase familiarity with survivors with disabilities and their use of service animals;
- Analyze the legal rights of service animal handlers;
- Explore complexities when conducting a forensic exam when survivors have service animals.

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**Poll**

In the chat pod, please answer the following question:

I have cared for a patient who had a service animal.

Yes  
No  
I don't know

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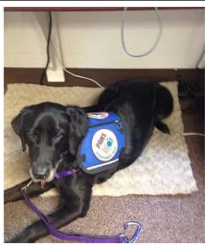
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**Service Animals: The Basics**

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**Service animals bring independence, but also barriers**

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- Service animals provide independence for people with disabilities by assisting them in their activities of daily living.
- However, when agencies do not know the role that service animals play, they can unintentionally create barriers for service animal users, such as:
  - Asking for unnecessary "certifications" or paperwork
  - Refusing access to spaces or programming.

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**Service animals**

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A service animal is "a **dog** that is **individually trained** to do **work or perform tasks** for a person with a disability."

- No other species of animal can be a service animal, except miniature horses (different regulations)
- Covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Apply to all areas of public accommodation
- No *formal* training (they can be owner trained) or certification required
- Service animals are not pets!

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### Identifying a service animal

Staff can ask two questions to “verify” that the animal is a service animal:

1. Is the animal (dog or miniature horse) a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What task(s) is the animal trained to perform for [the person with the disability]?

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### Cannot ask

Staff CANNOT:

- 1) Ask about the person's disability;
- 2) Require medical documentation;
- 3) Require “certification” or documentation that the animal is a service animal.

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### Tasks service animals may do for their handlers

Some example tasks a service animal might be trained to do are:

- Alerting to noise (examples: alarms, noises, smoke detectors, cars)
- Alert to physiological changes (examples: blood pressure, blood glucose, seizure)
- Interrupting behavior (examples: interrupting panic attacks or self-injurious behavior)
- Opening and closing
- Retrieving items
- Getting help
- Balance related tasks

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### Different than emotional support animals

- **Emotional support animals (ESAs)** play vital roles in the lives of many people with disabilities... but they are not covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- ESAs are not specifically trained to perform tasks.
- If, however, you are an entity covered by the Fair Housing Act (FHA), it is important to know the requirements for ESAs, as you may be subject to both the ADA and FHA.

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### Different than therapy dogs

- **Therapy dogs** provide comfort, affection, and love to people in need.
- They are not trained to perform specific tasks for a specific handler.
- They can often be certified.
- They are offered access to spaces at the discretion of a facility/entity.

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### It's a Service Animal... Now What? Frequently Asked Questions for Nurse Examiners

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**Where can a service animal accompany its handler?**



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**Answer: Service animal access**

Service animals must be allowed to accompany their handlers wherever the general public is permitted.

There are exceptions for sterile environments such as operating rooms and burn units. Doctor's offices and hospitals generally are not exclusion areas.

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**What happens if another patient or medical provider is allergic to dogs?**



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### Answer: Allergies

The health care facility is required to make accommodations to serve both patients receiving care (the service animal handler and the person with allergies)...

- Facilities should develop a policy to ensure a uniform response
- Ensure equal service provision

If the medical provider is allergic, is there another provider who can conduct the exam?

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### What happens if the service animal is destructive or dangerous?



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### Answer: Destructive or dangerous

- Service animals are expected to be well behaved and not destructive or dangerous. They should be in the control of the handler at all times.
- If the animal is a threat to the safety of others, it is within the medical provider's rights to ask the animal to leave (not the handler).
- Do not leap to removal, explore other solutions, such as discussing a care plan for the animal with the owner and seeking additional supports.

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### What are key considerations for patients and their service animals?



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### Answer: Key considerations for nurse examiners

- Consider the trauma both the patient and the service animal have experienced
  - Abusers target service animals
  - Both the patient and the service animal are in a new environment
  - There may be a changed relationship between the dog and the handler

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### Key considerations (2)

- Service animals are trained to minimize interaction with others when working
- Never pet a service animal without asking for permission
- Do not talk or whistle or otherwise distract the service animal
- **The key: Ignore working service animals to the extent possible**

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### Key considerations (3)

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- Depending on the types of tasks the service animal assist with, they may be helpful in helping the patient during the exam
- For example, assisting with transfer for examination

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### Questions?

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