



# TO YOUR HEALTH



Volume 23, Number 4



April 2018

## Fido Will See You Now

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Over the past tens of thousands of years, we humans have developed a loving attachment to our pets. According to the website Smithsonian.com, “Americans own some 78 million dogs, 85 million cats, 14 million birds, 12 million small mammals and 9 million reptiles.” Our pets provide companionship, follow us from room to room, cuddle with us at night, remind us how to be playful, and they are conduits of unconditional love. When we are sick, they can sense it. When we are upset, their presence alone can be of comfort. It is no surprise then that animals can be trained to provide Pet Therapy to those in need.

Have you ever noticed how good you feel when petting a loving animal? That is because there are physiological changes that happen to us when we interact with pets. The online newsletter [Healthline](#) writes, “Interacting with a friendly pet can help many physical and mental issues. It can help reduce blood pressure and improve overall cardiovascular health. It can also release endorphins that produce a calming effect. This can help alleviate pain, reduce stress, and improve your overall psychological state.”

Trained Pet Therapy animals are used in many different settings to provide healing. They visit children’s cancer wards, hospice patients, long-term care facilities, veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), stroke victims trying to regain motor skills, people receiving chemotherapy, and the list goes on.

There are programs that bring puppies into prisons to be raised by inmates who train them to help people with disabilities. The dogs not only serve their future owners, but they also provide benefits to the inmates who raise them. Taking responsibility and learning nurturing

skills when caring for the puppies builds self esteem for the inmates. It is a win/win situation.

Even though there is only non-verbal communication with pets, they are somehow able to work their way into our hearts. For those of us with our own four-legged furry friends, it can be devastating when our beloved pets die. We have to adjust to the absence of animals that greet us at the door, follow us from room to room and are the receptacles of our love on a daily basis. The disruption of these day to day rituals and routines can trigger feelings of sadness, disorientation and loss.

Unlike the often complex relationships with the people in our lives, our relationships with animals can be simpler and just plain easier. Pets become like members of our family and grieving the loss of a pet is not always understood by others. Some well-meaning people may be uncomfortable if we talk about our grief or think, “Why aren’t you getting over this already? It was just a dog”. For example, friends may be quick to ask when we will get another pet, as if one is as good as or interchangeable with another. According to an article by Joe Yonan in the Washington Post, “Simply stated, many people (including pet owners) feel that grief over the death of a pet is not worthy of as much acknowledgment as the death of a person,” researchers wrote in a 2003 article in the journal *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.

The process of grief is a normal part of coping with loss. How we each experience and process our grief is as individual as we are. Grief takes its’ own time and goes through different stages for us all. Some of the common symptoms can be: depression, feelings of guilt, an inability to focus, hopelessness, sleep loss and detachment. When in the midst of grief, it is important to be gentle with ourselves.



In Psychology Today, Adam Clark explains, *“Our grief is an expression of the love we have felt, the pain of loss and the process of having to reintegrate our life into what it will look like with the ‘absence’ of our pet.”* He recommends:

### 7 Self-care Essentials While Grieving the Death of a Pet

1. Set aside the time to grieve in your own way and release your emotions
2. Reflect upon the life shared between yourself and your beloved pet
3. Make sure you continue to meet your basic needs
4. Choose a calming practice and use it frequently
5. Maintain routines with your living animals as best you can
6. Memorialize the memory and love of your pet
7. Don't hesitate to seek support from understanding friends or relatives

Keep in mind that it may take time to move through the heavy grief and loss to get to a point of feeling lighter again. We are forced to reinvent ourselves in a new way without our loving companions and this doesn't happen overnight.

Eventually we may be open to adopting a new pet, however they will never be able to be a replacement for the lost pet. Each animal will bring a different personality into our lives. And we can always hold the memory of our beloved animal companions close in our hearts.

### Health Education Lecture

**“Balance Testing and Falls Prevention”**  
Presented by Susan Cusson, NP (Clinic),  
Jordan Cairns, OTR/L (Rehab) and  
Deb McNiven (Fitness)

Learn more about the difference between Physical Therapy and Personal Training and how to prevent falls.

Join us for this very informative lecture.  
Wednesday, April 11  
10:30am-11:30am  
Auditorium Center

### Shingrix Clinic

The Shingrix clinic on April 12 is full. Please call the Clinic to be added to the waitlist if you are interested. The vaccine is also available at local pharmacies if you would prefer to receive it there.

### BEDFORD DRUG PICK UP CANCELLED

Unfortunately, the Bedford Police Department can no longer pick up unused medications at the Clinic. They still have a 24 hour prescription only drug collection box in their lobby at 2 Mudge Way in Bedford Center. More information on how to safely dispose of medication is available in the Clinic.

### Announcement

We are sad to say goodbye to our Clinic Assistant, Andrea Howard. Andrea will be leaving Carleton-Willard in April for another position in a medical office closer to home. Andrea has been working in the Clinic for almost ten years. We wish her much joy and happiness. Please feel free to stop by and express your well wishes.

