

Dogs Allowed to Visit Critically-Ill Children

One Wisconsin hospital will soon allow dogs to visit critically-ill children in a pet visitation room.

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Laurie Meade lost her lifelong battle with cystic fibrosis in 2004, but she leaves a legacy at American Family Children's Hospital in Wisconsin, where critically-ill children will soon have a place to visit their family dog or cat during lengthy stays.

The "Laurie Meade Pet Visitation Room" will see its first patients when the hospital opens at the end of August, 2007. Meade bounced in and out of hospitals throughout her 32 years, but her health worsened dramatically after complications from a lung transplant. Three weeks before her death, her brother hatched a plan to lift her spirits and brought her dog, Beck, to the hospital.

"It brought tears to her eyes immediately," says Kitty Ricciardelli, Meade's mother. "The staff did what they could to get her outside and she was able to hold Beck for a few minutes. It was the best thing for her."

The pet visitation room was the brainchild of Meade's husband. After she passed away, money raised in her honor was donated to the hospital to have the room bear her name.

"The intent [of the room] is that it's primarily for children who have a terminal condition or who are not going home for a long time," said Michael Felber, hospital spokesman. "If you walk to the room today, it looks like a consultation room with a framed picture of Laurie's story."

He added that the room has a specially-designed, non-carpeted floor that is conducive to animal visits.

"I think [Laurie] would be extremely happy with what we did with the money raised in her honor," Ricciardelli said. "She spent a lot of time in hospitals growing up and her pets were very important to her."