



Bob Ipkar shows Denali, an Italian spinone, the layout of Lutheran Medical Center in Sunset Park. Below left, Ipkar and Jane Lanis introduce Denali to patient Grace Niemeyer of Bay Ridge (r.).

# FURRY DOCS ON DUTY

## 'Good Dogs' to bring smiles, comfort to patients at Lutheran

BY DENISE ROMANO  
PHOTOS BY TODD MAISEL

HAPPINESS IS a warm puppy — especially if you're sick.

Patients at Lutheran Medical Center will be receiving new warm and fuzzy therapy this week when Pups for Patients comes to the Sunset Park hospital.

A rotating team of dogs and their handlers will be available to visit patients starting Thursday.

"When people are at their most vulnerable, this is a chance to take the attention off of themselves," said Lutheran CEO Claudia Cane.

"There is not much fun in an inpatient's day, just food and a lot of poking and prodding," Cane added.

"This adds a distraction."

The dogs and their handlers go through nine training sessions provided by the Good Dog Foundation, a Park Slope group that's been providing dogs to nursing homes, special schools and hospitals in the city for 10 years.

"In nursing homes, dementia patients will start to re-

member things from their childhood," said Good Dog Foundation official Claire Cario. "Autistic children who never speak will start talking to the dogs."

A few weeks ago, two dogs — Denali, a spinone Italiano, and Godeva, a Yorkshire terrier — were a big hit at Lutheran with staff and patients.

Joe Ardigo, 62, of Marine Park, was recovering from a double knee replacement when he met Denali and Godeva.

The dogs made his day, said Ardigo, who is a musician and plays on the Coney Island boardwalk on Friday nights in the summer.

"I don't think I need my medication anymore. . . . I feel calm and serene. They make you forget about your pain."

Patient Michael Mozlin, 59, of Bay Ridge agreed.

"It's more pleasant when animals are around," said Mozlin, who was in rehabilitation after losing both legs. "I felt better. I calmed down a bit and it took my mind off things."



Patient Joe Ardigo gives little Godeva, a Yorkshire terrier, a happy hug, and Clorine Gantt (below), 72, of Flatbush seems happy to be introduced to Denali. At left, photogenic pooches strike pose for camera.

