ADAPT Program Set to Begin Serving Pediatric Patients: Nemours Children's Health is a Leader in Applying Clinical Animal-Assisted Therapy

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Dec. 17, 2021 - Nemours Children's Health, Jacksonville, will soon kick off its Assisted Dog and Pony Therapy (ADAPT) program for pediatric patients. The ADAPT program at Nemours Children's, in partnership with University of North Florida Brooks College of Health, is the first of its kind in the nation to apply clinical animal-assisted therapy in a pediatric multispecialty medical setting.

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This unique program integrates registered therapy dogs and miniature horses with clinical providers, harnessing the power of the human animal bond to help young patients heal from physical, emotional and/or psychological illness or injuries. The ADAPT program will benefit patients at the Nemours clinic by expanding mental and behavioral health services available and will augment medical services to improve the patient care experience. The ADAPT team will also implement research to advance the field of animal-assisted therapy.

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The ADAPT program recently completed its first research study, exploring Nemours staff readiness to implement such a groundbreaking program, educating them about animal-assisted therapy, and addressing any concerns to optimize the program. They also implemented a pre-pilot program with volunteer medical personnel participating to evaluate program procedures.

"I was very excited to be selected as a 'test patient' to help the ADAPT team fine-tune their processes and techniques," stated Sharon Leonard, M.D. "I was able to work on a professional goal of coping with work related stress that occurs day to day in patient care in a large organization. I believe the animal/human bond is powerful and will be an excellent tool our therapists can use with appropriately selected mental health patients."

The pilot program for pediatric patients is scheduled to have equine therapy sessions one day per week to begin in early 2022 and canine therapy sessions three days per week to begin later in 2022. Three miniature horses and several dogs will participate with mental health providers. Our ADAPT pilot program will enable current Nemours patients working with an ADAPT psychologist or social worker to engage in animal-assisted therapy with their clinician and a miniature horse. Nemours anticipates that the program will grow and be open to referrals from Nemours physicians and the community in the future.

The ADAPT program at Nemours is completely donor funded; contributions may be made at www.nemours.org/animaltherapy

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About Nemours Children's Health
Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, including two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of nearly 75 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's Health seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours Children's Health also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org.

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves.

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