



Paws for
Effect





Paws for Effect

by Jennifer
M. Rhodes

There is a new breed of therapist making rounds at the Military Amputee Training Center at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Every day you can find at least one of the three practitioners on duty dispensing his own unconventional kind of medicine to anyone in need.

Deuce, Raleigh and George are three specially trained therapy dogs who spend their days meeting, greeting and offering support to the patients at the MATC. Their areas of expertise are comfort and emotional support, and they offer it to patients and staff alike. “Dogs always know when you are hurt,” says Army Sgt. Brian Taylor, a rehabilitation patient at the center, “and obviously here, they know we are all hurt. They just come up and make us feel better.”



Above:

Sgt. Taylor gains confidence and comfort during a weight training exercise from Raleigh.

// Dogs always know when you are hurt and obviously here, they know we are all hurt. They just come up and make us feel better. //

Compensation for the dogs' work comes in the form of unreserved affection. Taylor sits down to catch his breath after a cardio assessment, and with sweat dripping from his brow, he pets Deuce. The chocolate Labrador Retriever enjoys the moment as he gets rubbed behind the ears and along his back. The contact also delivers Taylor some emotional comfort. "Deuce is kind of a nice little break," Taylor says. "He comes up and encourages you."

Taylor notices the effect that Deuce and the other dogs have on his fellow patients as well. "One of the guys upstairs is pretty badly wounded and the dog will lay with him when he is doing his exercises," Taylor says. "I know for a fact that helps him a lot emotionally. Guys come back battle-hardened," Taylor explains. "I think animals bring out the soft side of you. Especially for us, it kind of helps us find that emotion again."

Harvey Naranjo—adaptive sports coordinator, therapist and therapy dog program coordinator—echoes Taylor's sentiment and places high value on the dogs' ability to provide the patients with simple companionship. Naranjo says Deuce assists him in being more comforting to his patients. "When

I'm in rehab mode I focus on the physical side and forget the comfort side," Naranjo says, adding, "but that's where Deuce [and the other dogs] come[s] in."

Naranjo and his team of therapists worked with Taylor for two years trying to save his injured leg. During that time, Taylor watched as others gained strength and mobility through their therapy. Taylor's lack of progress ultimately led him to decide to have his leg amputated below the knee.

With Deuce by his side, Taylor now enjoys a very positive prognosis. Naranjo says Taylor's good prospects are due to his positive attitude and motivation. Taylor partly credits Deuce's presence and ability to brighten the atmosphere with helping him stay optimistic. "I miss him whenever he is not here," he says. "He has a huge impact on my therapy."

Naranjo, who is also Deuce's owner, says that Taylor had an immediate connection with the dogs. The first time the young sergeant came into his office, Naranjo says, "I turned around and he was rolling on the ground with Deuce. They connected very quickly." This type of interaction has helped Naranjo understand his patients and the best way to approach their therapy. "I like to see





how [the patients] are going to react when they meet the dogs.” Naranjo waits to see whether patients will greet the dogs with “baby talk” and a pat on the head or not react to them at all. “That gives me insight into how I’m going to interact with them [as patients] later on ... and insight into their personalities.”

The idea for dog therapy at WRAMC began three years ago, after a sports outing with the patients at a horse farm. Naranjo saw the patients interacting with the dogs at the barn. He had heard of the benefits of animal therapy from television programs and articles. Soon after that, he did some research, started talking to the

right people and made a proposal to the heads of the Physical Medicine and Rehab Department at WRAMC. “It just clicked. Dog therapy was a good fit,” he says. “It was just another way to get our patients what they need – by exploring both high- and low-tech solutions.” Other medical facilities have also expressed interest in dog therapy, including National Naval Medical Center at Balboa and Brooke Army Medical Center.

Today, Deuce works alongside Raleigh and George providing not only comfort therapy, but specialized physical support therapy as well. Deuce, along with several other dogs, has been trained to help patients

with weight bearing, balance and retrieval. Dogs can also be trained based on patient-specific needs, such as hearing injuries. “You would be amazed at what they can do to train the dog to enhance the patient’s quality of life,” Naranjo says.

George, a Golden Retriever who has been in service for two years, is specially trained for vestibular work, which focuses on balance and spatial relations. His owner, Oren Ganz, says George “helps with balance and walking. That’s what he is trained to do, but mostly he just gets loved.” Recently, George proved his compassion for patients, playing a very important and possibly life-saving role for one. Ganz recalls, “A



// It was just another way to get our patients what they need – by exploring both high and low-tech solutions. //

The benefits of service dogs go beyond the MATC walls. Because of the patient benefits, Naranjo has added a referral process for service members to apply for service dogs through America's Vet Dogs, New England Assistance Dog Services – Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans, and Canine Companions for Independence. "When patients leave the clinic, the public can focus in on their missing arms or their legs and ask questions, causing the patients to re-live their injury. With a service dog, however, the focus shifts," Naranjo says. "The questions are more about the dog and not about the injury. That's a huge benefit for our patients. The dog is the security blanket and support to go out and be independent," Naranjo explains.

patient had a seizure and [George] ran over to her and started licking her and making sure she was OK. He was very concerned about her." Ganz says, "He's very intuitive. He knows when people are feeling badly."

The newest dog, a Golden Retriever named Raleigh, assists around the MATC carrying towels and water bottles to patients. He is also trained for tugging, pulling and bracing. "He's very laid back," Naranjo says. "You could move a whole building and he won't move." Though Raleigh is still adapting to his work, he is quickly establishing not only routine rounds, but new friendships with patients in need of his special kind of therapy.

With their service dogs by their sides, patients apply their new independence to being more active in their everyday lives. "If you have a dog, you have to go out and walk the dog and literally do stuff. That's a huge benefit – two to three times a day you are getting some sort of exercise by having to take your pet out," Naranjo says.

Naranjo believes a service dog will enhance a patient's overall quality of life. Deuce and the other therapy dogs cause Naranjo and his team of therapists to pause and witness the powerful healing effects of "man's best friend." He says, "People have

Left: Sgt. Taylor takes a break from physical therapy and talks with another amputee.

Below: Raleigh, the newest therapy dog at the MATC, is trained for bracing exercises.



Assistance Dogs

Resources Recommended by Walter Reed Army Medical Center

America's Vet Dogs

<http://www.vetdogs.org>

- *Dogs given to combat veterans at no charge*
- *Required human/dog training*
- *Specific program called Veteran's K-9 Corps*

New England Assistance Dog Services – Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans: Canines for Combat Veterans

<http://www.neads.org>

- *Dogs given to combat veterans at no charge*
- *Required human/dog training*
- *Focused program on combat veterans*

The NEADS specialty program, Canines for Combat Veterans, can be reached via e-mail at veterans@neads.org.

Canine Companions for Independence

<http://www.cci.org>

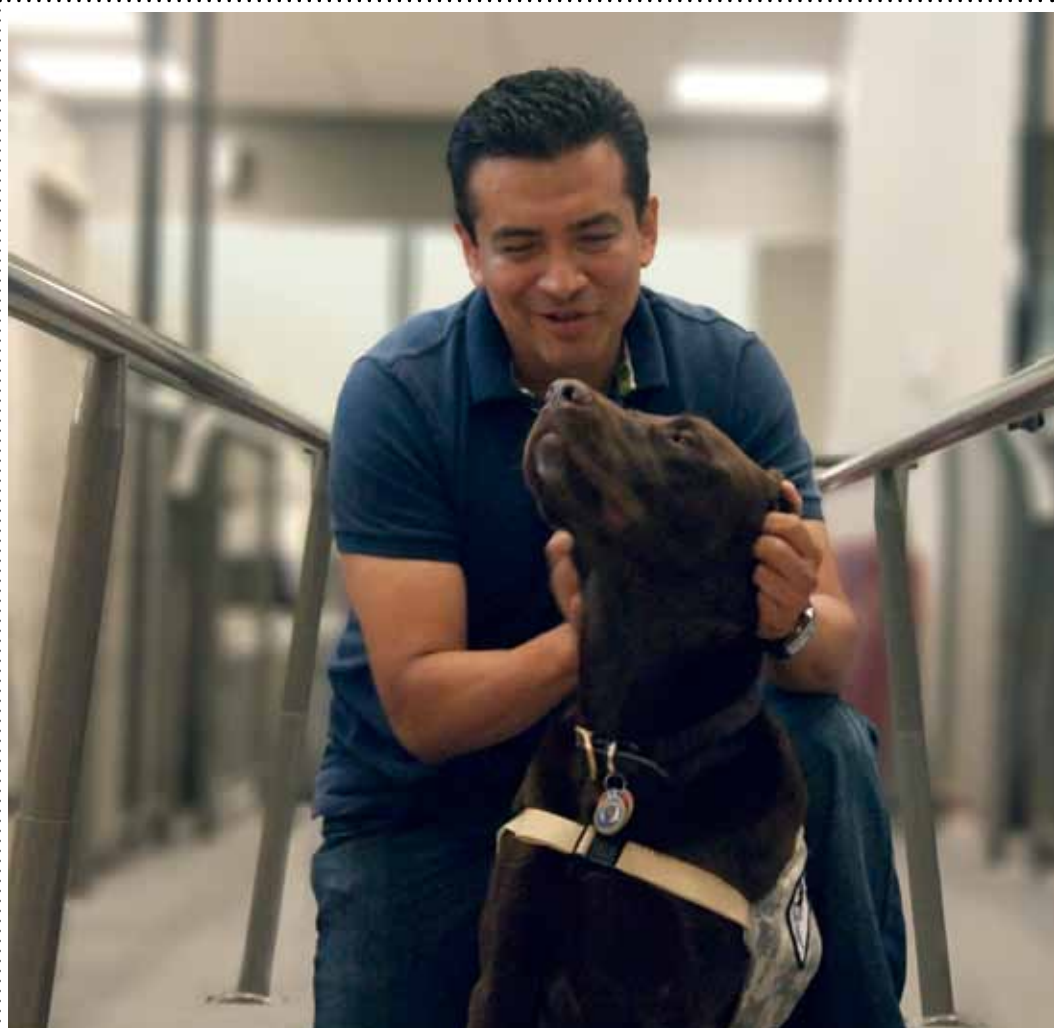
- *Dogs given to combat veterans at no charge*
- *Required human/dog training*
- *Maintains an active wounded veterans initiative*

been caring for these guys, for a long time. [With a service dog] they feel valued because they are caring for something else. They feel needed. It gives them motivation to give more.”

Taylor's prognosis continues to improve as he takes steps to adopt a dog companion of his own. Through America's VetDog, Taylor has applied for a dog with special training to help with balance and retrieval. “It will be pretty beneficial to have a dog ... to help me physically, and definitely I will love it emotionally,” says Taylor. From one who knows all too well about the uphill battle of recovery, Taylor ponders, “It's the little things in life that you've lost, that the dog can help you regain.” ■

SPECIAL NOTE: *At the time of this publication, Sgt. Taylor received his service dog, Lucy, from America's VetDog. Lucy, a mixed breed, was rescued from an animal shelter and specially trained for Taylor. The two have become fast friends.*

Below: *Harvey Naranjo, adaptive sports coordinator, therapist, and therapy dog program coordinator praises Deuce, the first therapy dog at the MATC. See personal profile of Deuce at right.*



A Good Dog Life

by Deuce Naranjo



Yawwwwn. Two paws out of bed and stre-e-etch. The sun is up and I've got a big day ahead of me. I flap my ears, shake my coat and prance down the hall looking for Harvey. I'm excited because today I'm going to see some very special warriors.

Harvey makes my breakfast. Yum! I wash it down with some gulps of water and head for the door. Harvey grabs my leash and off we go on a quick run to his office. We are training for the Hope and Possibility 5-Mile Run, where we get to race with amazing people, who are challenging themselves physically and mentally. The race is open to people with all kinds of disabilities, just like the warriors I get to work with everyday.

We make it into the office and Harvey helps me put on my work vest. Harvey pours some coffee and sits down at his computer. Click. Click. Click. What does he do on that thing? I head for my spot under his desk. From there, I can see my medals from marathons, fan mail and pictures from my buddies in Iraq along the wall.

Some of Harvey's staff come by with treats. They pet my coat and scratch my ears or rub my belly. It's a great way to start the day. But now, it's time to do some real work.

Harvey and I head over to the Military Amputee Training Center, where all our good work happens. Harvey works with amputee wounded

warriors. They come from all branches of the military and all walks of life, but the common bond they share is to get stronger and heal, both inside and out.

Harvey dresses their wounds and then puts the warriors through their paces. He stretches their muscles, encourages them to work harder and measures their improvement. I help out with weight-bearing walks, balance steps and sometimes even retrieval exercises. For me, it's more interesting than playing catch. Some warriors work on biceps, others pump iron with a leg press. They can even climb walls! Harvey works them hard.

My favorite part is when they take a break from their workouts. That's when I go into high gear! I bring them towels, water and even my best toys. I give them a few licks, wag my tail, look up at them with my big chocolate eyes and "Bam!" – instantly, they feel better, happier, stronger. I don't know how I do it, it just works. My reward: more scratches, rubs and pets, and sometimes treats, too!

At the end of the day, Harvey takes me home. It's supper time. I nudge my food dish and he rewards me

with a treat. Then, we practice some tricks. Right now we are working on a salute, so that I can pay proper respect to the warriors. My cue is when Harvey says, "Attention! Deuce, Salute. At ease."

Harvey and I finish the day with some TV. He's watching it and I'm starting to catch my ZZZs next to it. I start dreaming about racing in the IAMS Doggie Dash in New York City. Though I am a two-time participant, I've never won. With each sprint, I'm getting closer and closer to the finish line. I see Harvey at the end of the race with a very big dog bone. Ahhh, it's a good dog life! ■

Deuce's profile for the IAMS Doggie Dash Duathlon: <http://bit.ly/8YxEkB>



CONFIDENCE. STRENGTH. PRIDE.

Rebuilding through Recreation

By Elizabeth M. Lockwood