

Visitor has art of care down pat

By Danielle Butcher

NORMALLY people cringe when they think about spending a few hours in a dialysis unit. But Wellington jumps at the chance.

For the eight-year-old collie, the offer of free biscuits and continuous pats is an incentive to show up.

Wellington and his owner, Karen Benson, are part of the Dogs Victoria Therapy Dog program which visits aged-care and hospital facilities.

The collie visits the Southern Health Cranbourne Integrated Care Centre Dialysis Unit fortnightly, something that puts smiles back onto the faces of the patients.

"When Wellie walks up to each bed, the patients' faces just light up and they use their free arm to give him a pat," Karen says.

"In some cases when they seemed quite happy to have him around, we asked him to jump up and put his front paws up on the arm of the bed so they could give him more of a cuddle.

"He is very obliging as he loves the

attention. Some patients told the nurses they wanted to know ahead of time when the next 'doggy day' would be so they could remember to bring some

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Karen Benson

treats for him and they all know him by name now."

Betty, who has been coming to the dialysis unit for four years, said she loved the visits.

"We've got two dogs of our own, so we are dog lovers. In here, it just breaks the monotony.

"I get here at 7.30am and can leave about 12pm, but you never really know. I usually sleep, but it is nice to see the dogs, just lovely."

Nurse Sharon Morrow says the visits give patients something else to focus on during the lengthy treatment.



"It's also a conversation point — when the dog comes in everyone changes.

"A lot of patients sleep during the treatment, but we've got one on the other shift who likes to get woken up when Wellie comes to visit.

"So they really do look forward to it."

The unit caters for 12 patients at a time, with treatment times varying from four to five hours a day.

To arrange a DOGS Victoria therapy dog visit or to join the Therapy Dogs as a volunteer, contact Nicky Abell on 9889 4415.



Lapping it up: Betty looks forward to Wellington's visits every fortnight. **Left:** Wellington is only too happy to share himself around the patients. Alan was happy to oblige with a pat and a treat.

Pictures: Melissa Banks