

Former nurse visits hospital with comfort dog

Sherry Brown and Naomi the Comfort Dog
Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital

Sherry Brown has continued to provide comfort in the same hospital she retired from.

After hanging up her scrubs following a 49-year career, in 2018 she became the handler of Naomi the Comfort Dog and spends time each month visiting the same hospital she used to work at, Indiana University Health Methodist.

The duo provide comfort largely to hospital staff. But Brown also makes rounds visiting patients who request time with Naomi, 7, and stops in waiting rooms to provide families waiting on loved ones a break from worry. Beyond visiting the hospital, Naomi goes to nursing homes, schools, 911 centers and more. She's even responded to emergencies.

But she's not Brown's dog. Naomi belongs to Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Geist where she's considered a staff member.

Before Brown's retirement in 2018, the church, which she belongs to, decided to start a comfort dog ministry.

Brown was part of a team that traveled to Illinois to visit Lutheran Church Charities, which trains ministry comfort dogs. There they met Naomi—a 1-1/2-year-old golden retriever that already knew many commands. She became a part of the church.

Brown and Naomi visit Methodist twice a month. Before the pandemic, they also spent one night a month in the emergency room, but that program has been paused.

"She loves people in general, but the nurses' response to her is overwhelming," Brown said. "They're so happy to see her, and they seek her out. ... She has a tough job being petted all day."

Each visit, Brown and Naomi visit a couple of patients. Recently, the duo was greeted by a family they had comforted two years ago.



Honoree

Sherry Brown works with Naomi the Comfort Dog at Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital, where she had been a nurse. (IBJ photo/Eric Learned)

At the time, they were walking around the hospital when a father asked if Naomi could visit with his son, who had just suffered a stroke. Recently, the man was back in the hospital with his father-in-law and requested a visit again. His son had recovered and was back at work.

"It felt like we'd come full circle," Brown said.

In 2021, Brown had to take a hiatus from visiting the hospital with Naomi as she dealt with a stage 4 ovarian

cancer diagnosis and treatment.

But as soon as she was in remission, she was back at the hospital, Naomi in tow.

She plans to continue volunteering with Naomi as long as she's able, she said.

"I think dogs do things for people," she said. "After being a nurse for 49 years, I know how hard nurses work, and I think giving them a little smile in their day is a good thing."•