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## How to juggle therapy assignments

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Benny with a new friend

SG

Benny loves working as a therapy dog for special children. He enjoys being able to show his different behaviors and skills and move around and look right into someone's eyes. He also loves working in the rehab gym with adults and learning new things for each session and is superb at retaining learned behaviors. And going to school is his best job.

Petey is my therapy dog that is very comfortable staying in one place forever! He will lie on his blanket and cuddle and snuggle and just enjoy someone's touch.

Two very different therapy dogs, to very different personalities.

But now Petey is aging and I wanted to see how Benny would do covering some of Petey's assignments. As we discussed before, therapy dogs are not interchangeable. They each have their own skills and preferences and populations they relate the best with.

But now that Benny has a day free during the week as one assignment has ended, I wanted to see if he could take on something Petey was doing. This way Petey won't get burned out.

So I put on Benny's vest on a day he usually does not work and he perked up right away. "Oh boy, we're going somewhere today!"

Benny had been to this health facility before but quite a while ago, so we arrived half an hour early so we could walk around outside. We brought in his blanket and met the receptionist again. Benny seemed just fine. He smelled all around and seemed to know this would be his new gig.

I watched him closely to see how he responded to the different people and sounds and he was just perfectly behaved. He sat every time I stopped walking and when I chatted with a nurse for a while, just laid down quietly to wait.

Maybe introducing this facility back into his schedule was a good idea as it made him pay attention and think in new ways. It also showed me he could adapt to any environment and is so eager to please.

We spent half an hour and when we left, Benny settled right into his car seat for the ride home.

When you want to juggle therapy assignments, take it slow. Introduce the new place and people with great care and watch your animal closely for any signs of stress. Don't stay too long and go back soon. I am

going to bring Benny here weekly at least for now to make sure he is acclimated and each time is not a "first time."

So while our therapy animals may have specialties and favorite places and populations, changing it up a bit is often a good idea. The animal and you won't get bored and this way one dog isn't working too many hours a week, with the other getting restless at home!

That's the beauty of having two registered Pet Partner therapy dogs!



**Sue Grundfest**

Las Vegas Therapy Dogs Examiner

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