



# THE SUMMIT

MEDICAL TASK FORCE 10 NEWSLETTER

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## Pet Therapy Comes to Ibn Sina

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Since early March, Bengi, an Aegis Defense Services Ltd working dog, has become a familiar face around Ibn Sina Hospital. Bengi was the first Springer Spaniel selected for Medical Task Force 10's recently implemented Pet Therapy program at Ibn Sina Hospital. The program was the idea of LTC Christopher B. Mahnke, a pediatric cardiologist. Prior to deployment, LTC Mahnke worked at Tripler Army Medical Center, which utilizes several pet therapy dogs and even a pet therapy rabbit. LTC Mahnke first conceived of the pet therapy idea while running at the "Motel 6" track, where saw the explosive dogs out for their walk, and noticed how friendly they were. "I thought they could possibly do double-duty as pet therapy dogs since they already have the appropriate shots and examinations and were co-located with us."

LTC Mahnke visited the kennels and spoke with the manager, Mr. Paul Hammond, who was open to the idea. LTC Mahnke evaluated the current DoD policies and presented the program idea to Medical Task Force 10 Commander, COL Rafael De Jesus, for approval. Mr. Hammond states, "LTC Mahnke and I both realized the uplifting effect the dogs could have on patients and staff, so while LTC Mahnke



LTC Christopher Mahnke and Mr. Paul Hammond with Bengi

looked into the Army Regulations, I set about selecting several spaniels I thought would meet them."

Springer Spaniels primarily live in Great Britain and France and are used as hunting dogs as well as drugs and explosives search dogs. Springer Spaniels are loving, affectionate, and easy to please; this nature makes them perfect as pets in the home environment and as pet therapy dogs. Mr. Hammond selected two spaniels named Bengi and Bobby for the program. The dogs "went through intense veterinary scrutiny...which included a health check, blood tests, physical examination, and temperament test."

Bengi received his certification first and began pet therapy visits on 4 March 2009. In mid-April, Bobby received his certification and has begun visits as well. Since Bengi and Bobby perform their duty as bomb sniffing dogs 6 days per week, they typically only visit Ibn Sina one day per week. Pet therapy has received a positive response from staff and patients alike. LTC Richard White, an audiologist from Tallil who was visiting the audiology section at Ibn Sina, was happy to see the pet therapy program in action. During one of Bengi's visits, SFC Kristine Madison, NCOIC of the Outpatient Clinic, said, "Bengi made my day." Both inpatients and outpatients have responded positively to pet therapy. "Being hospitalized is stressful, and only more so in this environment with uncertainty about their military and medical futures," said LTC Mahnke.

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### Special points of interest:

- TF 10 PHYSICIANS PARTNER WITH PROVIDERS AT MEDICAL CITY (BAGHDAD)
- EIGHT MEMBERS OF TF 10 RAN THE BOSTON MARATHON IN TALLIL
- PREVENT HEAT INJURY WHILE EXERCISING
- BIRTHDAYS, AWARDS, AND PROMOTIONS

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## Pet Therapy Comes to Ibn Sina cont.

“Something about the pet therapy visits seems to reduce this stress; it is amazing to see the responses of these young Soldiers when they play with Bengi.” PFC William Urbelis, an inpatient during one of Bengi’s first visits said, “I was feeling terrible that day; seeing the dog made me feel much better.” SGT Jeremiah Conwell of C Company 172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was at Ibn Sina for a flight physical and saw both Bengi and Bobby come through. “Pet therapy is awesome,” said SGT Conwell, who had two dogs growing up. “It is a morale booster to have dogs around.”

Several host nation children hospitalized with burns, fractures, and other injuries over the past few months also participated in pet therapy. Mr. Hammond said, “Walking into the hospital on the first day was overwhelming. Not only was there an immediate impact on the staff, but there were also 3 Iraqi children with severe burns and amputations that just beamed with smiles when they saw Bengi. I have been in Iraq now for 4 years and have never felt so humbled.”

As a pediatrician, LTC Mahnke was interested in using the dogs to improve the experiences of the pediatric patients. A hospital environment can result in significant stress for children. “Add to that the severity of injuries and burns we are taking care of and the language and cultural challenges faced here and we are challenged with a

very difficult situation in which to provide pediatric care,” said LTC Mahnke. He adds, “With Bengi around, language and cultural barriers seem to melt away immediately, and we get to have a more normal interaction with the children.” Pet therapy also allows providers to “assess the level of pain versus anxiety that a child is experiencing.” “If they immediately perk up and smile when Bengi is around,” states LTC Mahnke, “I know the stress is more anxiety related (versus pain) and can address those issues appropriately.”

Presently, pet therapy occurs on Monday afternoons and continues to be a time patients and staff alike look forward to. Mr. Hammond shares, “Although this is my first involvement in pet therapy during my 18 years experience with working dogs, it most certainly will not be my last.”



## CME Partnership at Task Force Delta Med LTC Edgar Fike

On Saturday, 18 April, Task Force Delta Med hosted a cooperative medical engagement (CME) at the Military medical treatment facility (MTF). Past CME events had at most about 6 participants. This day, however, 13 physicians and 3 therapists participated. The physicians included the only Neurologist and Neurosurgeon in Al Kut, 2 orthopedic surgeons, 3 general surgeons, 3 medical physicians, and a urologist. They came for our usual lecture, but because we have been taking care of one of the local national trauma surgeons, we chose to do a Morbidity and Mortality conference on his care from start to finish.

After the M and M, they examined the patient for concerns about neurologic status following his cardiac arrest and hypoxia. They were grateful for the help that TFDM and The US Army were able to give to this patient. The following day they picked the patient up and took him to a hospital in Al Kut.

Our hope is that the goodwill from this case will persist. The surgeons that attended the conference are talking about bringing cases for discussion, and maybe even some case studies with patients to further the training and education of the surgeons and doctors. It also helps as the US Army transitions out of the area by setting the surgeons up for success in their local communities.

