

# When NOT to Help...

—Isa Helfrich, German Shepherd & therapy dog (and Deb Helfrich, Vice President)



## QUESTION:

What can (should) I do for patients during a therapy dog visit? For example, an elderly woman I was visiting asked me for a drink of water.

\* Chuckles, Golden Retriever

## ANSWER:

Very important question—thanks for asking it! To quote our guideline on this, “Never give food or beverage to patients, even if they ask. Likewise, never move or reposition a patient or their medical equipment. Find a nurse.” (you can find all of our guidelines at <http://www.therapydogs.org/guides.html>. [Click](#) on the “Policies Related to Handlers & Membership”)

## Ask Isa

So, if a patient asks you for water, food, or medication, politely let him/her know you cannot do this and offer to alert a nurse. Many patients cannot swallow safely or are on strict dietary regimes—and they may not even know they have any restrictions. Likewise, if a patient asks you to get him/her out of bed or move him/her in any way, politely advise that you cannot do so and offer to let a nurse know. There may be injuries we do not know about which could be exacerbated by movement. Also, you may get injured trying to move a patient without help. This applies even to our volunteers who do have medical training!

Though you may want to help someone by fulfilling a request for water, food, or help to the bathroom, please do not. Always get a nurse. Stick to what you and your dog have been trained to do and know best—providing companionship and comfort through the therapy dog visit.

**One last reminder. If any of you happen to see ME and I'm the one asking for a cookie (a steak, some chicken, a hot dog perhaps...)**—

**THAT would be a perfectly acceptable request to fulfill. 😊**

