

Paws for retirement

BETHESDA Hospital bade a fond farewell to its cuddliest volunteer last Wednesday, who is retiring to take care of his dodgy knees.

Tolly has been visiting the hospital and other health facilities for five years as part of the Animal Companions program. Owner Sandy Nicholson said that sadly, a ruptured cruciate ligament now made it difficult for the 12-year-old shetland sheepdog to walk.

"We can't walk him usually but bring him to the hospital and I can't keep up with him. He wants to see everybody and he won't go home until he does," she said.

Mrs Nicholson and her dogs first became involved in Animal Companions after reading about pet therapy in the newspaper. Her other dog, a pure-breed scottish rough collie called Oberon, also volunteers.

"Tolly is a very people-friendly dog and it seemed like a shame to have him sitting at home when he could be bringing joy to people," she said. "I would strongly recommend it to anyone who has a

friendly dog. You can work with your best friend!"

Jean Mulder, a former Claremont councillor who was born in the suburb and has lived there for all of her 85 years, was among the patients who appreciated the sheltie's affection.

"It is absolutely fantastic. You are lying there and then out the blue, the lady comes in with her dog. It gives you an amazing lift, especially if you love animals. It gave me a lift for the whole week," she said.

Animal Companions has more than 100 members and is always looking for new volunteers. Dogs do not need to be trained but must be social, well-behaved on a lead and undergo an assessment.

Mrs Nicholson said it had been a difficult decision to end to Tolly's volunteering days. "He loves his visits to Bethesda and goes nuts when he puts on the blue coat which is the uniform."

For information on Animal Companions see www.aciwa.org.au.



Bethesda patient Jean Mulder with Tolly.

Picture: Will Russell

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