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K-9s Join ED Security Team as Part of Pilot Program

Cedars-Sinai is introducing two security service dogs, Cali and Coco, to the Emergency Department in an ongoing effort to enhance security and safety for patients, visitors, volunteers and staff. The two dogs are female Belgian Malinois, a breed of sheepdog known for being active, sociable and hard-working.

Cali and Coco will join the Security team in July as part of a pilot program, serving under the supervision of professional handlers, former police officers and canine experts Ray Soto and Gina Luttenegger. The dogs will work in alternating shifts, seven days a week, from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. They will patrol the Emergency Department's entrance and lobby as well as campus parking structures. (Soto and Luttenegger will be dressed in Polo shirts identifiable by Solutions Group International logos on the shoulders.)

The dogs will not enter patient rooms or other sensitive clinical areas. This makes them distinct from the Barbara Cowen POOCH Volunteer Program, whose dogs visit patients. Staff, patients and visitors should refrain from petting the security dogs.

"Cali and Coco were carefully selected to serve our medical center based on their obedience, work ethic and sociability," said Bryan Croft, senior vice president for Operations. "The health, safety and comfort of our patients remain our top priorities. These dogs are highly trained and intelligent animals, and their arrival is part of our continued commitment to enhancing our robust security presence."

Cedars-Sinai is the latest health system to use service dogs as part of security, joining The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and Phoenix-based Banner Health, among others. Johns Hopkins launched its canine program with one dog in December 2016, expanding it to two by February 2017. Banner Health introduced its long-standing canine program in 1992 and has since expanded to more than 40 canine-handler teams across its Arizona and Colorado locations.

To prepare for their new jobs, Cali, Coco and their handlers underwent 40 hours of specialized training at Adlerhorst International, a service dog training facility in Riverside.

To assist in maintaining a safe environment for everyone on campus, all staff are encouraged to remain alert and to report any security concerns to the Security Department at 310-423-5511.



K-9s Coco (left) and Cali sit with their respective handlers, Ray Soto and Gina Luttenegger.