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Pets for Health and Safety

pets can be more than just cute and cuddly

Many homes have them. For individuals living alone they provide companionship. Couples who have no human offspring of their own adopt pets and regard them as their children. Families with kids already still take on the extra responsibility of animals and other creatures because, in their opinion, it wouldn't be the same without them. Certainly, they leave hair all over the place, and in the early stages they are as messy as any baby; but in general, they ask for very little and give back so much more. As for being dumb, they are far from it.

They do seem to have a sixth sense, especially when it comes to first impressions. Even a dog which is normally friendly towards strangers may take an instant dislike to an individual for no apparent reason. In the dog's mind there will be a very good one, and although the cause escapes their owner, he or she would be advised to be wary. Animals can pick up on subtle nuances that people miss. Dogs particularly have an acute sense of smell and can, for example, detect the faintest odour of perspiration. To them, this is a signal, perhaps of fear, or maybe aggression. Either way, it tells them to back off and be cautious.

On the subject of scent, I have heard of cases where animals have detected the presence of cancer in their owner long before the disease was suspected and diagnosed by a medical practitioner. One man's friend came visiting regularly, and the resident dog accepted the guy as his friend also, but never gave him any special attention. Then, one day the animal decided to sit right next to him and took to sniffing his leg and leaning against it. On subsequent visits, the behaviour was repeated, and this went on for some time. The two friends thought nothing of it until the visitor began experiencing increasing pain and had it checked out. He was told that he had cancer in his leg and it needed an operation. After prolonged treatment, the friend returned to his mate's house. The dog greeted with the usual wag of the tail, waited for the obligatory pat, but didn't sit next to him and ignored the leg completely. It seemed that, in the dog's estimation, it had drawn attention to a physical problem that had been fixed, so that was that.

A similar case involved a pet cat. As everyone knows, although they seem to display particular affection towards their owners, much of it is geared to food and a bit of fuss. Felines are pretty much their own people, and they like their own space. So, when her moggy started being over-friendly, the owner was rather puzzled. Instead of just being content with a warm, soft lap and a tickle, the cat would climb up higher and kept nudging the lady's breast with its head. Sometime later, cancer was detected in that same breast. After the operation and treatment, the animal reverted to the lap-cat that it was before.

Strange? I think not. Even the old hard line taken by medical and care facilities with respect to hygiene is gradually being relaxed, and some institutions are beginning to recognise the therapeutic benefits of patients receiving visits from animals. Especially when individuals are confined to hospitals or nursing homes and have few, if any, regular visits from family or friends, having the company of a chummy canine for a short time is making a big difference. I seriously doubt that the owners of the animals and the organisers of the practice even consider or care that the animals get something out of it too; but I'm sure the furry, perhaps feathered creatures, know that they are returning some small quality of life to the sick and lonely.

These "animal therapists," however, are rank amateurs compared to the trained companions of those afflicted with sight impairments. Amazing creatures they are, totally dedicated to the welfare of their charges. They truly are seeing-eye-dogs, looking out for anything that might disadvantage their owner well before it is encountered. Even the majority of us who have perfect eyesight have nowhere near the perception of these so-called animals.

That's how we tend to think of them: ignorant, mindless creatures who don't know what like we do. Think again, people! Animals don't view life in terms of dollars and cents; what they care about is the welfare and survival of themselves, their species, and any other creature that comes their way and befriends them; even, and it would seem, especially humans!

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