

# Bringing Paws-itivity into Pharmacy!

## An evaluation of a staff pet dog in a pharmacy department



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### Introduction

There is evidence to support the introduction of pets into the workplace as a means of improving staff wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Perceived benefits include increasing social support and social interactions, stress reduction, and improving task performance.

Since February 2023, our Pharmacy Department has had fortnightly visits from a dog named Bernie, a ten year old chocolate Labrador owned by a pharmacy staff member (see Figure 1). Prior to commencement of his visits, registration and approval were provided by the hospital's Infection Prevention Department and Pharmacy Executive (on a trial basis) in accordance with the hospital's Pet Dogs in the Workplace Procedure. This included a survey of all Pharmacy Department staff to confirm that there were no staff objections to his presence. Following approval, Bernie was permitted to visit office areas of the Pharmacy Department.

Pharmacy staff are informed of Bernie's presence and provided opportunity to pat him, take him for walks during tea breaks or lunch and/or attend team meetings.

### Objective

To evaluate the impact of a staff pet dog visits on pharmacy staff, to inform whether visits would continue.

### Methods

Pharmacy staff were invited to complete a voluntary, anonymous REDCap<sup>®</sup> survey with Likert scale questions relating to joy and distraction associated with the visits and opportunity for comments.

A separate REDCap<sup>®</sup> survey was completed by the dog owner which included open ended questions relating to their experience.

### Results

A total of 48 pharmacy staff members who had at least one interaction with the staff pet dog responded to the survey. Responses were received from all roles and locations across our department.

The vast majority of participants agreed that a staff pet dog resulted in joy (see Figure 2). The enthusiasm in the comments demonstrated the clear positive impact Bernie's presence had on staff members. A small number of participants strongly agreed or agreed that Bernie resulted in distraction (see Figure 3).

Responses from the dog owner indicated their experience was positive. Bernie helped facilitate social interactions between the owner, new staff, and staff working in different department areas, improving their connectivity within the department. Additionally, seeing staff's gleeful reactions to Bernie proved to be rewarding for the owner.

The three biggest challenges the owner faced included:

- Overcoming organisational restrictions which initially did not allow the dog into pharmacy areas
- Grooming the dog prior to each visit
- Scheduling the visits within the department to maximise the number of pats Bernie received.

### Staff pet dog visits resulted in JOY?

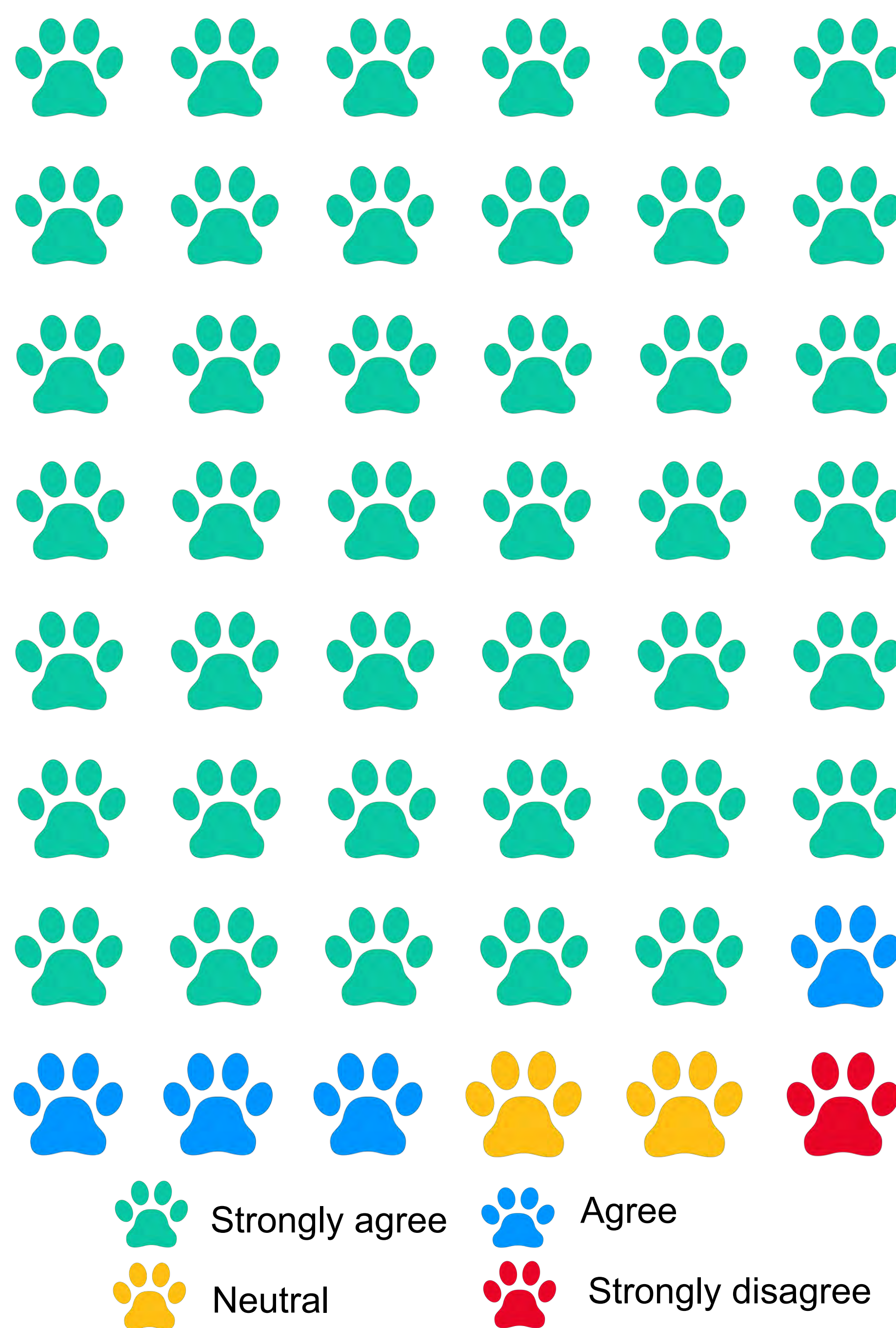


Figure 2. Survey results of joy from visits



Figure 1. Bernie, RMH Pharmacy Wellbeing Pawject Officer (staff pet dog)

### Staff pet dog visits resulted in DISTRACTION?

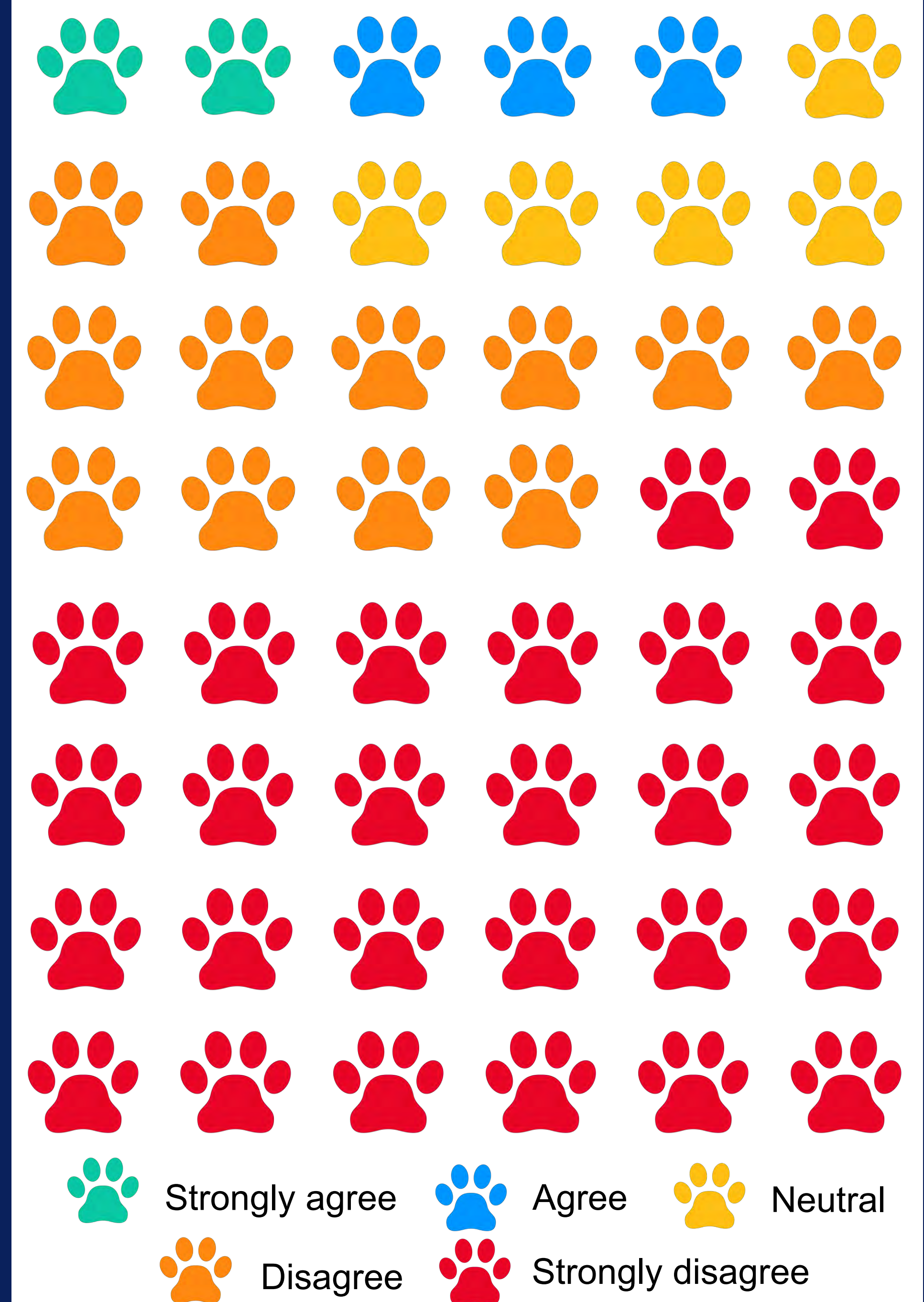


Figure 3. Survey results of distraction from visits

98% of staff surveyed would like the Pharmacy staff pet dog to continue visiting (2% undecided)

### Conclusion

Bernie has become an integral part of the Pharmacy department. The positive impact that Bernie has had on staff has been highlighted by this survey.

Results indicate support for dog visits to continue at the same fortnightly frequency given the owner's grooming and scheduling challenges, and to consider an alternate location to address trip-hazard concerns. Regular visits from a staff pet dog can be considered a novel strategy to improve hospital pharmacy staff wellbeing.

### Acknowledgements

The RMH Pharmacy Wellbeing Committee

Bernie for being a good boy @pharmadog\_bernies

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1. Foreman AM, Glenn MK, Meade BJ, Wirth O. Dogs in the Workplace: A Review of the Benefits and Potential Challenges. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2017; 14(5):498. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14050498>