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Category: poster

Topic: Treatment methods of equine-assisted psychotherapy: Group training methods

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Title: INTEGRATING PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH HORSES INTO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT IN AN INSTITUTION: PRESPECTIVES FROM WARD-STAFF AND PATIENTS

Keyword 1: horse assisted psychotherapy

Keyword 2: substance use disorder

Keyword 3: integration of horses into institutional treatment

Abstract:

Objective: To investigate the therapeutic benefits of horse-assisted psychotherapy (HAP) for patients with substance use disorders (SUD) and explore methods for integrating HAP into standard treatment within institutional settings.

Design: The study employed semi-structured interviews to investigate the viewpoints of six ward-staff and twelve patients enrolled in a SUD treatment facility. The study focused on the integration of HAP into the overall treatment regimen. HAP sessions were conducted weekly over 6 weeks at a farm outside the institution, facilitated by a mental health provider and a horse specialist. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyse the data.

Results: Ward-staff and patients highlighted the value of integrating HAP into the treatment continuum. Suggestions included ward-staff involvement in HAP, as well as the introduction of animals within the institution. By bringing themes that often arose in HAP, such as emotional regulation, social perception, boundaries, and relational dynamics, into therapeutic sessions outside HAP, therapists could augment the therapeutic impact and promote continuity of care. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of curating group compositions thoughtfully to ensure better therapeutic outcomes, for instance by placing patients needing to work on similar issues together. Patients and staff expressed a desire for more extended group sessions, suggesting that a 6-week duration may not provide enough time for deep processing. Having the possibility to refer patients for more than one group successively was seen as positive.

Conclusion: Overall, the results highlight potential strategies for integrating HAP into other aspects of institutional SUD-treatment like more staff involvement. By integrating topics and experiences from HAP further into existing treatment, therapists can better harness the therapeutic potential of human-animal interactions to facilitate healing in individuals recovering from SUDs.