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Curriculum vitae:

Kristina Naden is a senior lecturer in veterinary nursing at Otago Polytechnic, and has been lecturing in veterinary nursing since 2009, after working as a surgical veterinary nurse in a specialist veterinary clinic. Her research interests include the selection, induction, and use of horses in riding therapy, which is the focus of her Master of Rural Science program of study. Further studies in this area will investigate the impact of riding therapy programs on individual horses in New Zealand. Other research interests include the health of dogs in Tonga, a small nation in the Pacific Ocean. This research is currently investigating the presence of endoparasites and leptospira spp in the canine population of Tonga, and the related potential impacts on public health.

Category: Short Paper

Topic: Horse Related Topics: Equine Education and Training (selection of horses)

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Title: SELECTION AND INDUCTION PROCESS OF HORSES FOR NEW ZEALAND RIDING FOR THE DISABLED ASSOCIATION

Keyword 1: Riding therapy

Keyword 2: Horse selection

Keyword 3: Horse management

Abstract:

Objective: Selection of suitable horses for riding therapy and their subsequent induction is important for the success of a riding therapy horse, however there is a current lack of data that identifies attributes of an ideal riding therapy horse, and induction process. This study examined current selection and management processes of horses used in New Zealand (NZ) for riding therapy.

Design: A series of focus groups were held online with volunteers from riding therapy groups in NZ. Respondents were asked how their group selected and inducted horses, and how they managed horse-related issues. Following transcription of session recordings, Iterative Thematic Inquiry was used to develop themes and sub-themes.

Results: While a range of official policies and procedures exist for these groups, most respondents referred to their own experience, personal preferences, and specific group requirements when selecting and inducting horses. Smaller horses of any breed, with a range of experience and a calm temperament, aged 8 – 10 years were preferred. The most common induction challenges were horses being reactive to sidewalkers, the riders' mounting block, and the variety in handlers. Behavioural issues such as biting, kicking, or bucking were addressed either by individuals or by group consensus, and included a break from riding therapy, a change in environment, or retirement.

Conclusion: The ideal riding therapy horse is a calm, trainable horse with a wide range of experience, who can easily adapt to the riding therapy lifestyle during induction. Methodology to achieve this varied greatly between groups, and reported occurrences of undesirable behaviours indicated deficiencies in the selection, induction, or management processes. A review of these processes is recommended, to ensure optimal success for horses. The appropriate incorporation of variation in the ridden environment for horses should also be investigated as a means of responding to undesirable behaviours.