

Horse Species Symposium: Equine-Assisted Therapies: Incorporation into university programs

652 Partnering therapeutic riding and higher education. C. Burke,* *University of New Hampshire, Durham.*

The field of equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) is a growing segment of the equine industry in the US. Research in this area continues to support anecdotal evidence that EAAT works as a treatment modality for individuals with a wide range of disabilities. As a result, the need for knowledgeable, qualified, and diversely educated individuals with practical experience in EAAT is rising. Additionally, as the breadth and depth of this field increases, so do career opportunities, and therefore more college students wishing to pursue this course of study. Since 1969, the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl; formally NARHA) served as the primary educational body in this field. Today, there are increasing educational opportunities at the collegiate level available for the pursuit of EAAT as a degree option. In 2010, PATH Intl developed Higher Education memberships for colleges and universities in an effort to aid in curriculum development for EAAT. Many institutions are in the process of evaluating whether to offer EAAT as a course of study and if so how best accomplish this goal. In this session career options in EAAT will be explored and many related questions answered. What job opportunities are available for graduates with a 2- or 4-year degree in EAAT? How can universities best prepare students to succeed in this industry? Should institutions of higher education partner with a local EAAT center or start their own program? What other university resources are required to incorporate EAAT and what are some benefits to the university? What opportunities for cross-disciplinary studies exist? How would a PATH Intl Higher Education Membership fit into the curriculum and is it a worthwhile endeavor? Questions of liability, legal structure, and faculty qualifications will also be explored.

Key Words: equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT), PATH International Higher Education

653 Equine-assisted therapy and recovery from combat trauma. J. M. Kouba*¹, B. L. McDaniel¹, E. A. Eason², and K. G. Odde¹, ¹*Kansas State University, Manhattan*, ²*Fort Riley, KS.*

After more than a decade of conflict in the Middle East, the number of soldiers being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) is steadily increasing. Population surveys on post-deployment soldiers report a prevalence rate of 10 to 20% for some type of combat-related stress disorder. The diagnosis of PTSD and mTBI presents challenges for mental health providers, and relies heavily on screening instruments and clinician interviews. Treatment options for soldiers routinely involve various types of counseling

or psychotherapy, along with psychotropic medications. Despite these established approaches, a need still exists for novel treatment interventions. Although equine-assisted therapy (EAT) has been used as an adjunct therapy for a variety of health conditions, it is gaining popularity as an alternative treatment modality for veterans at private EAT facilities and some military institutions. Despite the positive results reported by these facilities, research supporting the effectiveness of EAT on alleviating the symptoms of PTSD or mTBI in our military population is limited. Therefore, a 14-wk study will examine the efficacy of EAT with active-duty military personnel who have experienced psychological and/or physical injury in a tour of duty and been diagnosed with PTSD or mTBI. Twenty-four subjects from the Warrior Transition Battalion at Ft. Riley, Kansas, will be randomly assigned to either a treatment (T, n = 12) or control (C, n = 12) group, each consisting of 6 soldiers diagnosed with PTSD and 6 with mTBI. The T group will be taught basic horsemanship skills in weekly small group sessions. The participants mental status will be assessed several times during the trial using survey instruments. Salivary cortisol will also be measured. The T group will also complete an EAT questionnaire and be interviewed upon completion of the trial to evaluate their perceptions of the program. We anticipate that the results will demonstrate a benefit of EAT in reducing symptoms associated with PTSD and mTBI, and help improve the quality of life of soldiers transitioning to the next phase of their military or civilian career.

Key Words: equine-assisted therapy, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mild traumatic brain injury

654 Research in equine-assisted activities and therapies. E. L. Berg,* *North Dakota State University, Fargo.*

A growing body of evidence exists supporting the benefits of equine assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) for individuals with a wide range of diagnoses including cerebral palsy, autism, stroke, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and attachment disorder. Research in the field of EAAT is necessary to demonstrate effectiveness of EAAT for individuals with disabilities, to validate and standardize industry practices, to garner support from the medical community, and to work toward reimbursement for these services from insurance companies. The objective of this session will be to highlight research in the field of EAAT, examine collaborative opportunities for institutions of higher education with industry and private organizations, discuss who would be integral members of a research team, as well as available funding sources in the area of EAAT.

Key Words: equine-assisted therapy, higher education, research