



## Issue Brief:

### AHA Inc. Clarification on Hippotherapy and Adaptive Riding/Therapeutic Riding

#### *How Does Hippotherapy Differ from “Adaptive Riding” or “Therapeutic Riding”?*

- **Hippotherapy:**

The term “hippotherapy” refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement as a therapy tool to engage sensory, neuromotor and cognitive systems to promote functional outcomes.

Best practice dictates that occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology professionals integrate hippotherapy into the patient’s plan of care, along with other therapy tools and/or strategies.

- **Adaptive Riding/Therapeutic Riding:**

The terms “adaptive riding” and “therapeutic riding” are synonymous. These terms are commonly used to refer to horseback riding lessons for individuals with special needs, taught by horseback riding instructors who have received specialized training and may be certified to teach riding lessons to students with disabilities. These instructors adapt their teaching style, the environment and/or equipment to facilitate acquisition of riding skills and participation in an enjoyable activity. When participating in riding lessons, opportunities may be available for riders to participate in competitive equestrian events, recreation and leisure, education, socialization, and/or fitness.

*\*The term “adaptive riding” more accurately describes this activity and is more consistent with other activities and sports for individuals with disabilities. The term “therapeutic” may imply “therapy”, and may be misleading to consumers and the public, therefore, it is the position of AHA Inc. to describe this activity as “adaptive riding”.*

#### **Issue Brief:**

The inclusion of hippotherapy in an occupational therapy, physical therapy or speech therapy treatment plan should not be confused with participation in adaptive riding/therapeutic riding.

AHA, Inc. is aware of consumer confusion based on information in marketing materials regarding the benefits of riding lessons. Claims of riding instructors working on fine and gross motor skills, cognition, speech and language skills, sensory difficulties, communication, muscle tone, impaired gait and a variety of other functional limitations through horseback riding lessons may place consumers at risk. Claims such as these may create an impression that “clinical treatment services” are being rendered by horseback riding instructors. While participation in sports and recreational activities, such as horseback riding, can be beneficial, “therapeutic riding”/”adaptive riding” should not be regarded as a medical therapy service or a means of habilitation/rehabilitation. There are ethical and legal implications when an individual without the appropriate education and training imply that they can make assessment decisions and improvements to function for individuals with special needs using an adaptive sport.

The training, educational background and minimum requirements of horseback riding instructors varies widely, and in most states is unregulated. At a national level, voluntary certification in teaching riding lessons for individuals with special needs may be obtained through organizations such as PATH Intl., Certified Horsemanship Association (CHA), the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association (CANTRA) or Riding for the Disabled (RDA).

Licensed and credentialed healthcare professionals such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, and mental health professionals with additional continuing education in the inclusion of horses in treatment can legally and ethically identify, address, and prioritize intervention objectives as well as coordinate planning for ideal outcomes in treatment of functional limitations and impairments.

The inclusion of horses in medically necessary therapy services, delivered by licensed occupational therapists, physical therapists or speech language pathologists differs greatly from participation in adaptive sports activities such as horseback riding. In the interest of consumer protection, both services should be clearly marketed and described.