

# SOME INDICATORS OF WELFARE IN THERAPY HORSE

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Welfare refers to an organism's permanent state over time and includes the organism's subjective perception of its environment. (1) In the evaluation of the concept of welfare, it is important to consider chronic conditions rather than acute and temporary conditions in order to accurately determine the welfare level of the living thing. When it comes to the welfare of animals that cannot express themselves verbally, the concept of welfare becomes more complex and multidimensional.

Indicators used to determine animal welfare should have some principles these are validity, reliability and ease of use. (2) To accurately assess an animal's welfare more than one indicator should be used that includes all aspects of welfare ( behavioral, psychological and physiological) and reflects the animal's chronic condition.

Therapy horses are exposed to various internal and external stimuli before, during and after the hippotherapy sessions they are involved in, in their shelter and diet, and in the face of the dynamics of the herd they shelter. These stimuli affect the therapy horse's welfare positively or negatively, more or less. As a result, it is important to know the welfare indicators in order to determine, protect and improve the welfare of therapy horses.

Indicators of welfare in horses can be health-related, postural, physiological or behavioral These indicators are listed below. (1)

## 1.Health Related

- Body lesion
- Body Condition Score
- Specific Postures

## 2.Postural

- Ear position
- Neck shape

## 3.Physiological

- Muscular hypertonicity

## 4.Behavioural

- Behavioural repertoire
  - Stereotypic Abnormal Repetitive Behaviours
  - Apathy
- Time- budget
  - Rest
  - Aggressiveness
  - Active locomotion
- Other
  - Reaction to humans
  - Cognitive bias

Physical injuries (old and new injuries related to working equipment) directly affect the welfare status of the horse as it impairs the bodily integrity of the horse. Old scars with hairless or white hair on the body surface are a sign of an unfavorable state of welfare. (3)

Body condition score (BCS) is a scoring system based on palpation (hand control) and visual data to evaluate the body fat distribution of the horse. In the BCS, horses are scored between 1 and 9, from lean to obese. The purpose of the BCS is to determine the condition of the horse's body rather than calculating the live weight of the horse. (4) The fact that therapy horses have scores of 7 and above and 4 or less may indicate that they are not in ideal condition in terms of body fat distribution.

The most well-known symptoms of poor equine welfare include stereotypical and abnormal repetitive behavior. These behaviors are repetitive sequences of behavior without a clear purpose and function and occur in the presence of non ideal living conditions. (5) For example, it is known that social isolation in horses increases the occurrence of these behaviors. (6)

As a result, knowing the scientifically accepted welfare indicators and using these indicators to evaluate the welfare of therapy horses are important in terms of maintaining and increasing the welfare of the therapy horse.



Crib-biting and meaningless repetitive movements are examples of stereotypical behaviours.



Having a low or high Body Condition Score and having aggressive reactions are among the signs of poor welfare.

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