

Hippotherapy as a Treatment Tool

What is Hippotherapy?

The professional treatment utilizing the horse, its movement, therapy activities and the natural environment to meet discipline-specific therapy goals. Currently offered by licensed occupational therapists, physical therapists, or speech therapists (Cook, 2013). What is the purpose of bringing horses into the rehabilitation process of physical therapy? Some may say it's a fantasy for horse-crazy folks to live out their desires, but the treatment is not only a functional and realistic tool in the operations of rehabilitation and physical therapy, but in fact, improves the process for patients and therapists in both experience and efficiency.

Treatment

The treatment sessions astride a horse offer a greater stimulatory and motivational environment for disabled peoples in both a physical and psychological realm. In addition, it provides an environment that will keep patients coming back for their therapy sessions with vigor, rather than treating it as a chore. Half of the improvements made in physical therapy are up to the willingness and application of the patient to pursue self-betterment.

Treatment sessions may include sitting astride the horse, therapy off of the horse, or both...directing the horse by riding aids that facilitate client goals.

Activities such as grooming, feeding, leading, and saddling can also be beneficial while facilitating client goals.

The conclusive purpose of this research is to bring to light the evidence as well as the proper terminology in practice so to spread awareness of Hippotherapy as a legitimate tool for Physical therapists, Occupational therapists, and Speech Therapists in the state of Montana.

History

1952 – Helsinki Olympics:
Liz Hartel: paralysis rehab.
1969 – NARHA & therapy riding centers in Europe, US, Canada
70's-80's – G/S/A model of Hippotherapy
1999 – World-wide acceptance & AHA established

Patients

+75,000,000 million live with:
63% Genetic Syndromes
18 million have CP
1% are autistic
1/6 children are developmentally delayed
15 million stroke survivors
+2.8 million have MS
TBI, Trauma, PTSD...

Compared to Traditional Therapy

“I can probably see her for an hour and a half in a clinic or in the school and get what I can get in probably 10 to 15 minutes as far as pelvic movement (Engel et al., 2007).”

“These people have been to therapy over and over again and its hard work, it hurts, and they don't like it. When they are riding, they don't even realize that you are a therapist (Engel et al., 2007).”

In the atmosphere of hippotherapy we are given the opportunity to be agents of change, to provide stability and in the process – naturally support our patients mentally and physically through their rehabilitation or disability by modernizing our traditional methods in such a way.



The Science

The horse at a walk serves as the therapeutic medium by transmitting movement –

Postural Stimulation & Sensory Integration

Proprioceptive sensorimotor stimulation leads to improved posture and facilitates the finding and strengthening of the best possible movement patterns of the body, as measured against its hypothetical norm.

At the same time this movement correction trains the musculature by dispelling its imbalance and regulating muscle tone. It also maximizes the possible or remaining range of motion of the joints (Engel et al., 2007).

The Terminology

To avoid professional complications its important to be as verifiable and up-to-date on terminology as possible.

“Legal boundaries frame the progression and must abide by those boundaries. These issues become more important as practitioners in all disciplines are asked to conform to licenser issues and provide third-party payers with knowledge-based practice using evidence-based methods (Foto & Collins, 2005). Practitioners use the term *hippotherapy* just as they would *sensory integration* or *neurodevelopmental treatment* specifically highlighting that it is a therapy tool, within a practice framework.



Cook, Rebecca, “*Brown Pony series*” vol. 1-4, *Introduction to Hippotherapy, Risk Management to Safety in Hippotherapy, Considering Hippotherapy in Your Career Plans, The Business of Hippotherapy*, 2013 – 2014

Engel, Barbara T., Mackinnon, Joyce, (2007). “*Enhancing human occupation through Hippotherapy: A guide for occupational therapy*”.

Foto, M., & Collins, L. (2005, July 11). *Reimbursement Perspectives*. OT Practice, 19, 32.