

## **Perceptions of positive equine welfare**

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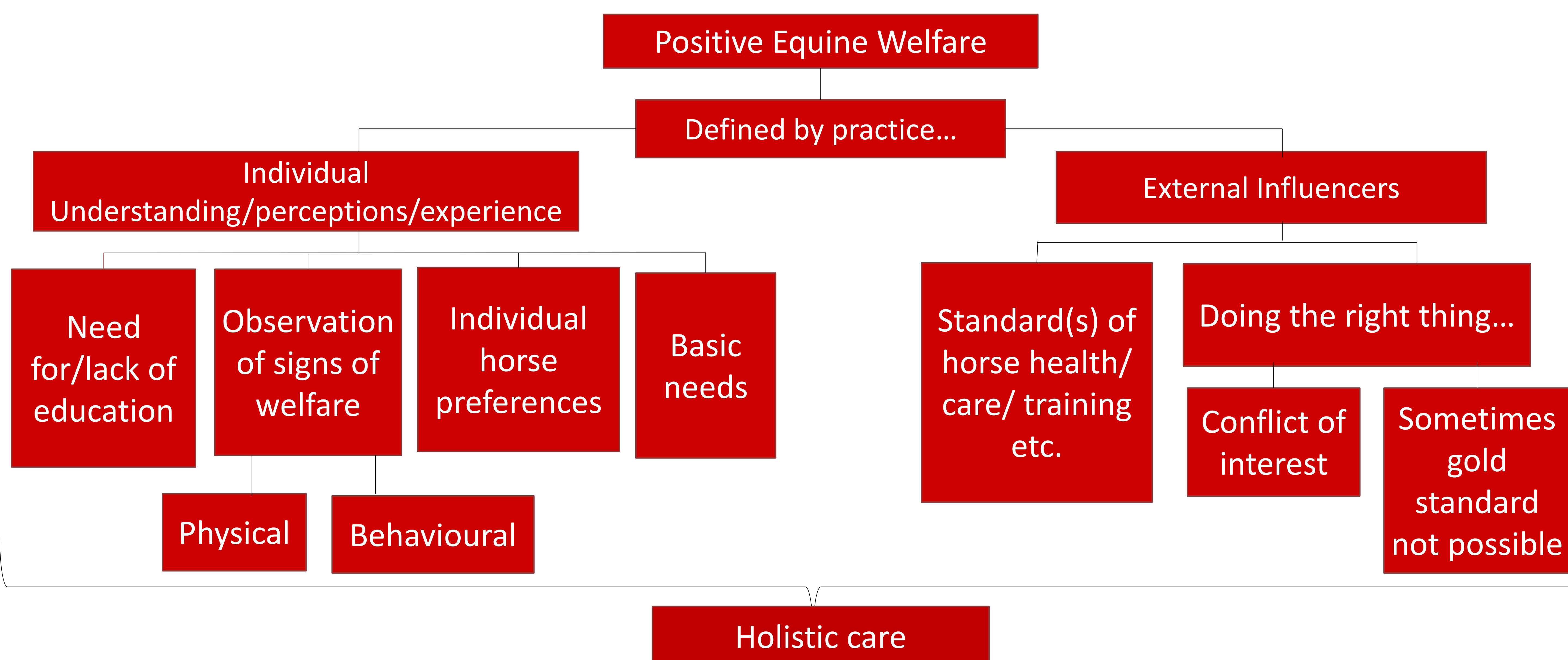
*University Centre Hartpury, Gloucester, UK*

Welfare science historically focusses on quantitative measures but more recently increasing emphasis has been placed on affective states and the promotion of positive affective states (Mellor, 2012). This study aimed to investigate whether there is recognition of this at practitioner level, looking specifically at the term 'positive equine welfare' (PEW).

Interview questions;

1. What is your understanding of PEW?
2. What do you believe are signs of PEW?
3. What do you consider to be good practice that promotes positive welfare in the equine industry?

Semi-structured interviews with three professional breeders and three professional riding instructors were coded, following the process set out by Saldana (2016). A rigorous process of inter-subjectivity followed to agree codes and discuss how these could be consolidated to synthesise a more robust 'meaning map' (figure 1).



**Fig 1.** Results schema showing two core categories and underlying themes

1. Positive equine welfare is a complex, multi-dimensional construct which resists being neatly defined as 'good or bad' and is not adequately defined as simply attending to the animal's basic physiological needs
2. Focusing on the individual animal is important which can be affected by a variety of factors
3. A critical dimension of PEW is seeing it as an interactive phenomenon between animal and humans, where human experience appeared limited by understanding at times
4. The construct of PEW revealed interesting epistemological and practice 'tensions' – there appears to be a prescriptive/more general/'external' view of PEW and a personally constructed locally situated view
5. PEW can be usefully understood as a '*process of action*' rather than just a '*process of definition*'

**Implications:** There appears to be an unconscious desire for education and clarification as we discovered a '*lack of certainty*' about the construct of positive equine welfare. Issues of judgement, professional accountability, evidence, and the personal construction of PEW were at the heart of this suggesting that PEW is not a value-neutral construct. Much more work needs to be done to understand the interplay between '*conjecture about PEW*' (what we say), and the '*practical experiences of PEW*' (what we do).

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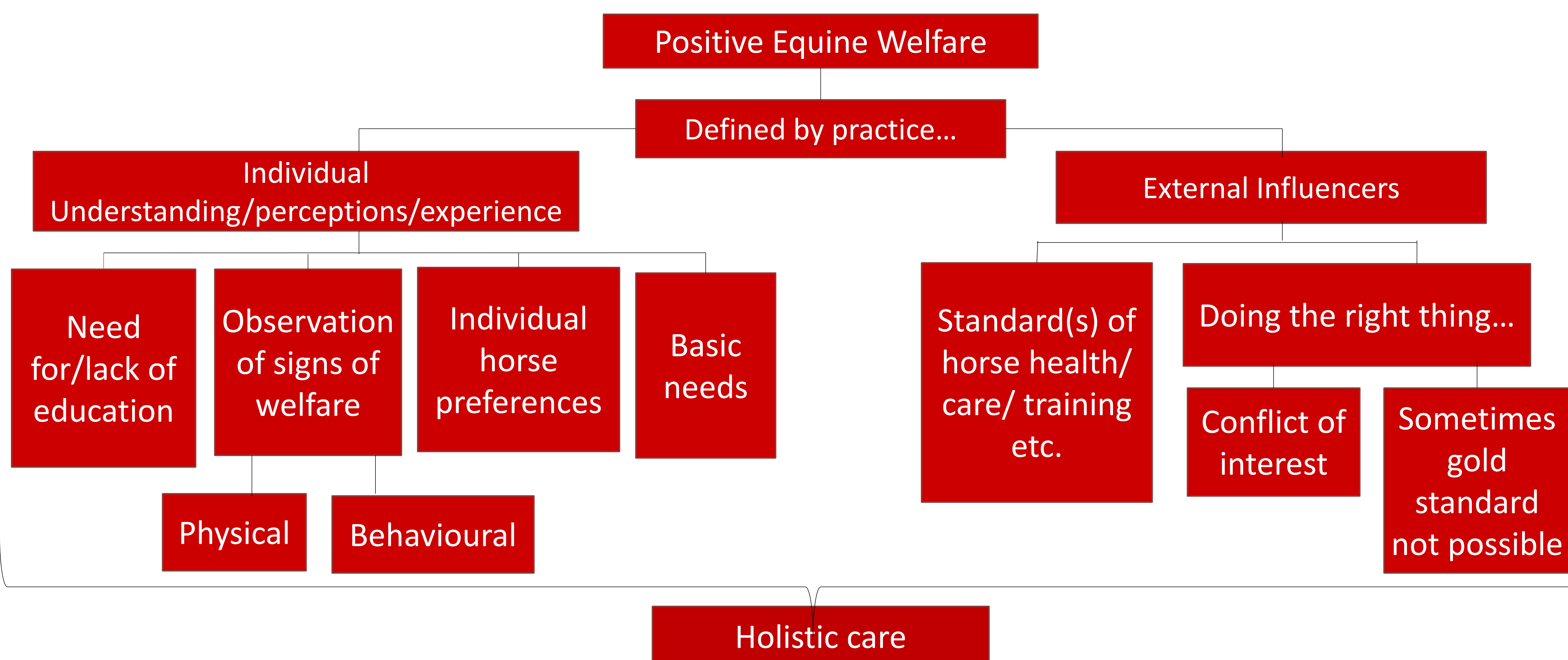
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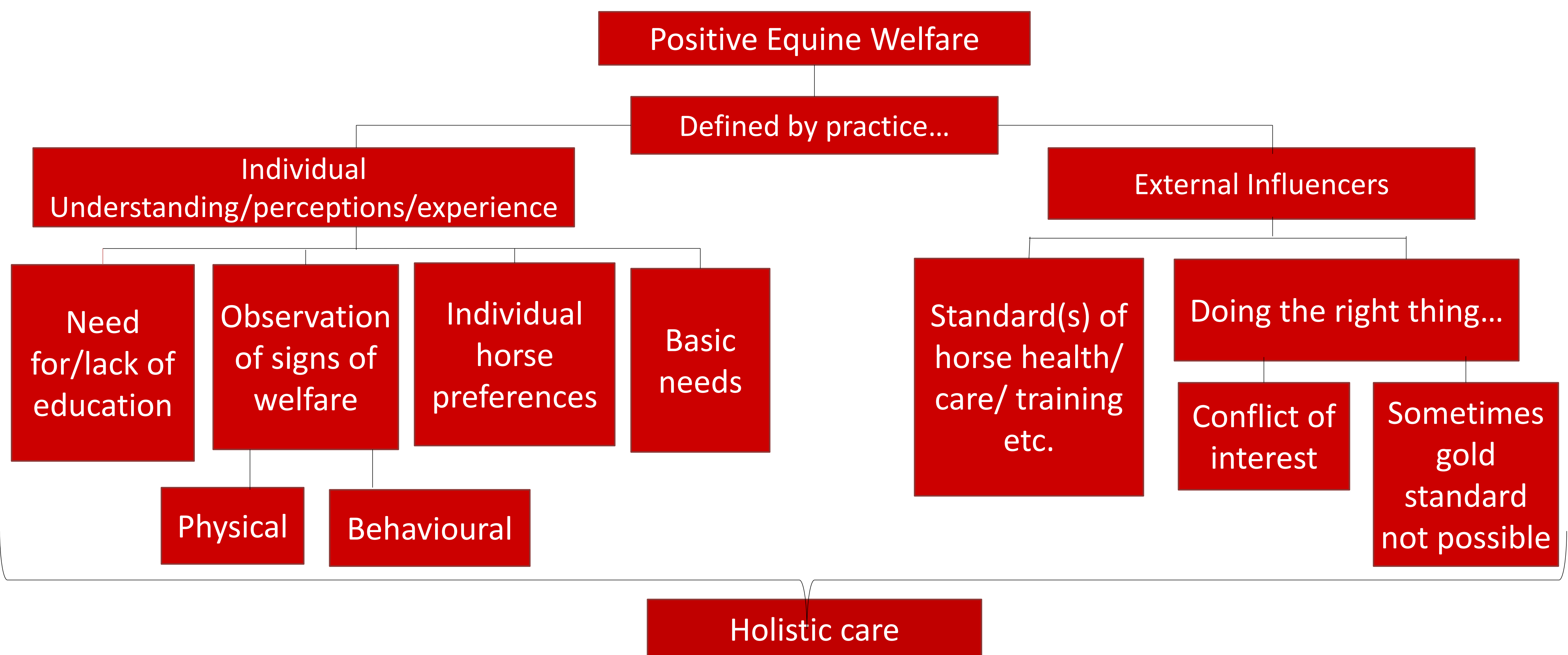
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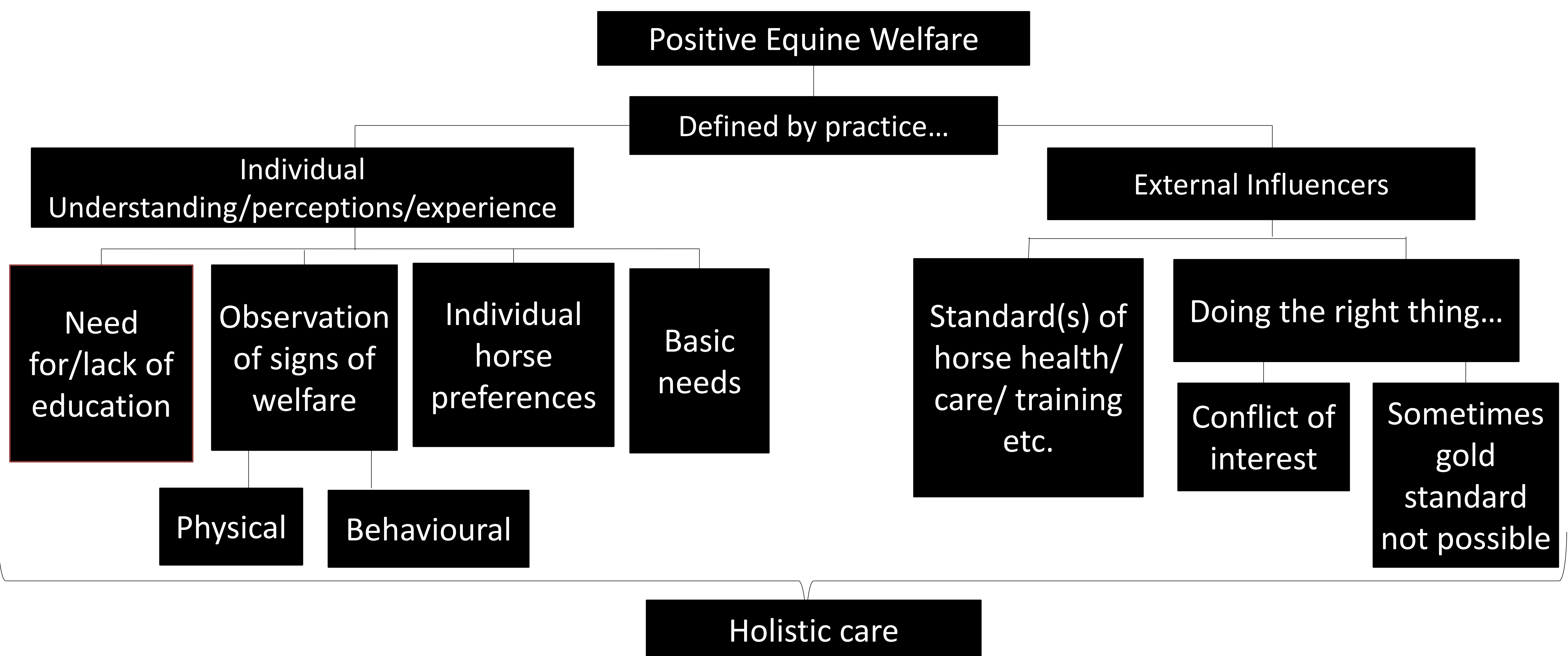
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