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Bowen, Annette G.; Randle, Hayley; Labens, Raphael; Tabor, Gillian

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Key movements to observe when assessing quality of movement in horses

Bowen A¹, Randle H¹, Labens R¹, Tabor G²

¹*School of Agricultural, Environmental and Veterinary Science, Charles Sturt University,* ²*Hartpury University*

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Aim: Outcome measures for movement tasks are lacking in equine physiotherapy. Creating a new outcome measure for quality of movement will improve the ability to monitor treatment efficacy, therefore enhancing evidence-based practice. This study asks, what are the most commonly observed in-hand movements during assessment of horses for performance management and rehabilitation, and how are complex functional movements currently being measured?

Design: Online survey of equine sports medicine veterinarians, physiotherapists and equine allied health professionals.

Method: A survey, distributed by professional associations, gained responses from 81 equine clinicians. Descriptive statistics, chi square analysis and ANOVA along with thematic analysis of free-text responses was performed.

Results: Twenty-four in-hand movements were identified as being used more frequently than others. The movements chosen were based on the individual case presentation. Barriers include access to facilities and the training level of the horse and handler. To measure complex functional movements 81.6% agree or strongly agree a modified Patient-Specific Functional Scale would be useful.

Conclusion: Despite challenges in the field, a key group of in-hand movements are routinely used to observe equine quality of movement. Equine clinicians do their best to record changes in movement and have a strong desire for more relevant outcome measures.

Key Practice Points:

- There is a strong desire for outcome measures relevant to equine clinicians' needs.
- Challenges to assessment include facilities, handlers and horses training level.
- Equine professionals identified key in-hand movements which will be included in a new outcome measure for quality of movement.