



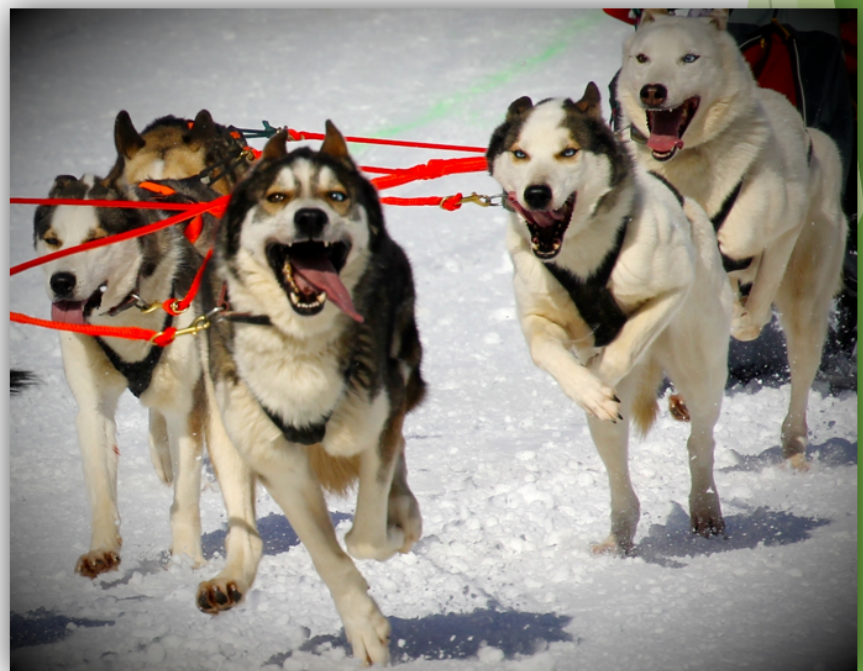
4th ECVSMR Scientific Meeting

20-22 July 2023 MAISONS-ALFORT, FRANCE

PROCEEDINGS



EUROPEAN COLLEGE
OF VETERINARY SPORTS MEDICINE
AND REHABILITATION



ORGANISER

European College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation (ECVSMR)

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Nathalie Crevier-Denoix (Chair)

Virginie Coudry, Jean-Marie Denoix, Philippe Pourcelot (INRAE Engineer, Website),

Laure Semonin (Secretary)

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES

- **Small Animals:** Dominique Grandjean (Chair), Barbara Bockstahler, Gisueppe Spinella, Zoran Vrbanac.
- **Equine:** Nathalie Crevier-Denoix (Chair), Virginie Coudry, Jean-Marie Denoix, Lisa Katz, Annamaria Nagy, Maarten Oosterlinck

REVIEWERS

Fabrice Audigié, Francesca Beccati, Anna Bergh, Erik Bergman, Ana Boado, Barbara Bockstahler, Nika Brkljača Bottegaro, Henry Chateau, Anne Couroucé, Nathalie Crevier-Denoix, Florent David, Valérie Deniau, Jean-Marie Denoix, Laura Fitzharris, Robert Gillette, Dominique Grandjean, Sandrine Jacquet, Lisa Katz, Morgan Lashley Claire Moiroud, Marion Mucha, Annamaria Nagy, Maarten Oosterlinck, Marie Rodin, Barbara Riccio, Eric Richard, Jose Manuel Romero, Gisueppe Spinella, Sarah Taylor, Emmanuelle Van Erck, Zoran Vrbanac, Renate Weller.

IMPRESSUM

Editor in Chief

Nathalie Crevier-Denoix

Editors

Sandrine Jacquet, Virginie Coudry, Philippe Pourcelot

Publisher

ECVSMR

ISSN: 2510-8093

Managing horses for performance - Ethical and regulatory aspects in Europe

S. Montavon¹, P. A. Poncet¹, C. F. Trolliet¹ - COFICHEV - info@cofichev.ch

¹Swiss Horse Industry Council and Observatory - COFICHEV

Conference presented by Dr Stéphane Montavon, DVM, CERP

Summary: The evolving status of both the leisure and sport horse in the Western world, coupled with societal expectations to ensure animal dignity and welfare, presents equine veterinarians with new challenges. In their daily practice, veterinarians must consider whether the equine's intrinsic needs are being satisfied, assess relevant constraints and weigh stakeholder interests while also seeking to transmit this knowledge to their clients.

Current situation: Although ethically aware, veterinary practitioners are mainly motivated by the need to maintain the usefulness and effectiveness of equines. Therefore, this is an anthropocentric approach to disease control primarily aimed at preserving human interests.

A paradigm shift: Equines, once primarily utilitarian and symbols of physical prowess, in Western society currently fulfil functions that are mostly recreational or sporting in nature and have captured new, often young, female and urban, demographics. At the same time, societal demands for animal welfare are growing and are questioning many current practices. Critics denounce the suffering of animals during their use. There are two opposing approaches: on the one hand, there is the **ethic of responsibility**, which is supported by the majority of people and aims to protect animals but is not opposed to their use. This pragmatic and reasoned line of thought accepts the asymmetry of the relationship between humans and equines, which stems from the irreversible status of domesticated animals acquired over the millennia. On the other hand, the **ethic of conviction** rejects the idea of a species gap and advocates anti-speciesism and the general abolition of animal use. Based on the development of the level of sensitivity in society and the social and life sciences, e.g., bioethics, the Swiss Horse Industry Council and Observatory (COFICHEV) defends the right to use equines if certain conditions are met. In doing so, it supports **the ethical principle of personal responsibility** towards them and reciprocity: if we ask a lot from equids, we must give them a lot in return. This is based on the results of research in various disciplines and promotes equitable relationships between humans and equines. This reasoned approach examines, from a moral perspective, the interests of both parties, the intensity and extent of their needs, and the nature, causes and justification of constraints. It is therefore a systematic deliberation about what is right and just from a current perspective. Through this understanding, it develops questioning and a search for appropriate responses in a given context.

Veterinarians also face challenges: The veterinary profession plays a decisive role in ensuring and improving equine welfare. The study and training programmes in Europe are undoubtedly well designed to transmit the cardinal values of the profession supported by numerous social competencies (client communication, responsiveness, reliability, taking responsibility, transparency, etc.). However, even if animal ethics are taught, a large proportion of equine veterinarians subsequently encounter difficulties in carrying out **a detailed and honest weighing of interests** in practice. The main obstacle is how to objectively assess the natural needs of the equid as well as identify infringement of their dignity and well-being. In addition, a veterinarian's relationship with horses can often be characterised, like that of the owners, by notions of use, control and submission, especially when their value is primarily measured in monetary terms. By emphasising a human view of welfare, some veterinarians fail to recognise equines as subjects of their own existence seeking to satisfy intrinsic needs. By placing too much emphasis on self-defined goals, such as pain relief, these same veterinarians fail to recognise the animal's perspective, i.e., how it perceives its environment. During treatment, they are not always able to correctly identify the behavioural signs of discomfort or pain. This can lead, for example, to the treating veterinarian not being able to give appropriate advice or to postpone the time of euthanasia. Clearly, some equine veterinarians have not yet grasped the practical significance of the gradual extension of anthropocentrism to an approach based on biocentrism that gives equines an intrinsic value to be respected.

A challenge for equine medicine: Recently, there have been several signs that the sustainability of the equine industry depends on how the public perceives equine welfare, especially when activities or disciplines come under fire. Today, only ethologists and the few veterinarians who have developed strong skills in equine ethology are in a position to offer their expertise in the field of advice and ethics, especially when weighing the different interests. However, in the future, therapists (veterinarians, osteopaths, physiotherapists...) and other actors in the equine industry will have a personal responsibility in their daily practice to master the determining concepts such as dignity, well-being, use of constraints (justified or not) and whether or not a particular action is justified based on the circumstances at hand. This knowledge will help them to take ethical principles into account and to focus their attention on a harmonious interspecies relationship that includes the needs of both equines and humans.

The major themes: In summary, the knowledge to be developed serves to master the processes that lead to the reduction or avoidance of unjustified constraints affecting the dignity of equids and harming their well-being (pain, damage, anxiety, degradation, profound modification of abilities or phenotype, excessive instrumentalisation). This requires an objective understanding of the biological, physiological, biomechanical, behavioural and adaptive functions and capacities specific to the equine species.

There are various European laws on animal protection that characterise welfare. It is defined as a state in which an individual does not experience negative sensations and lasting dissatisfaction of its natural needs. More specifically, the *conditions under which it is kept and fed do not disturb its bodily functions and behaviour. Nor do they place excessive demands on its adaptive capacity. Thus, within the limits of the latter, the equine animal retains the possibility to behave in accordance with the ethogram of its species.*

Social Licence to Operate: The Chair of the FEI Welfare Commission, Prof. Natalie Waran, presented in a preliminary report the role and rationale for the creation of the Commission, its objectives and its role in relation to equestrian sports (April 2023). She explained the importance of the Social Licence to Operate (SLO) to the existence and longevity of equestrian sport. Equestrian sport is unique because it involves the use of an animal that the public perceives as particularly vulnerable. This commission conducted two large-scale surveys: one among the equestrian community (FEI and non-FEI stakeholders) and one among members of the public in 14 countries. The public survey showed that 67% of respondents were concerned about the involvement of horses in equestrian sports. Respondents called into question whether horses enjoy being involved in sport and wanted to see improvements in welfare standards. Public concern for the horse and its welfare appears to be more important than other social licence to operate issues such as personal safety and sustainability. The equine veterinary practitioner is intimately connected with this public concern and plays a prominent role as a therapist, educator and reference person with their clientele.

Conclusions: What COFICHEV is questioning today is how some socially or professionally credible individuals can defend erroneous ethical opinions through seemingly well-meaning and logical reasoning (guaranteeing animal welfare, e.g., through overuse of anti-inflammatories or restricting free movement on the pretext of the risk of injury). These misconceptions may arise from the intrinsic complexity of the situations observed, the weight of tradition or an imperfect command of scientific knowledge that leads to overestimating, underestimating or misinterpreting certain behavioural traits.

References:

Poncet PA, Bachmann I, Burkhardt R, Ehrbar B, Herrmann R, Friedli K, Leuenberger H, Lüth A, Montavon S, Pfammatter M, Trolliet CF: Ethical reflections on the dignity and welfare of horses and other equids - Avenues for better protection. Swiss Horse Industry Council and Observatory, Bern, CH, https://www.cofichev.ch/Htdocs/Files/v/6129.pdf/Publications-cofichev/COFiCHEV_Ethique_F_2022_DEF_202205030.pdf

Dyson S. and Pollard D. Application of a Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram and Its Relationship with Gait in a Convenience Sample of 60 Riding Horses. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/6/1044>

Campbell, M.L.H. An Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Competitive Sport: Theory and Function. *Animals* **2021**, *11*, 1725. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11061725>

Interim Report to the FEI Sports Forum in Lausanne - April 2023 - Prof Nat Waran on behalf of the FEI Commission members Equine Ethics & Wellbeing <https://inside.fei.org/system/files/FEI%20SF%202023%20-%20EEWBC%20Interim%20Report%20Presentation.pdf>

Poncet P.-A., Montavon S., Trolliet C.-F., Du thérapeute au conseiller en éthique: un véritable enjeu pour les vétérinaires équins in SAT/ASMV, 7-8, 2023 (accepted and forthcoming, July-August 2023)