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ENGL 3000

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### Article Critique

Lanning, B.A., & Krenek, N. (2013). Guest Editorial: Examining effects of equine-assisted activities to help combat veterans improve quality of life. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 50(8), vii-xiii. doi: 10.1682/JRRD.2013.07.0159

In this article, Beth A. Lanning, PhD and Nancy Krenek, PT show how equine-assisted activities can help veterans returning from deployment to improve and repair their quality of life. This article specifically focuses on the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International Equine Services for Heroes program, and their use of therapeutic riding to improve physical and mental health in veterans. In this paper, I will show that while the authors had support for their research, there are many factors that can affect the outcome.

Lanning and Krenek researched the use of therapeutic riding over a 24-week period, collecting qualitative and quantitative data. They assessed 13 combat veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan using the 36-Item Short Form Health Survey version 2 (SF-36v2) and Beck Depression Inventory-2<sup>nd</sup> edition (BDI-II) to analyze their results. Veterans in the therapeutic riding program participated in a wide range of activities with their horses, from barn chores and groundwork to riding activities. The PATH therapeutic riding program not only provided horse companionship for the veterans, but it also provided the support of other veterans that volunteered their time to help their fellow comrades. These volunteer veterans provided a social

and emotional support network that would continue even after the therapeutic riding treatment was over. At the end of the 24 weeks, the veterans were interviewed and scored on the SF-36v2 and BDI-II scales. Overall, the participants reported being more social, more trusting, and less depressed after the interventions.

In this article, Lanning and Krenek posited that working with horses provided a nonjudgmental, safe environment for the veterans to open up and reassess the world around them in order to help them overcome their post-traumatic stress and increase their sense of self-worth. They reported that the horses' natural reactions to the veterans helped them re-evaluate their behaviors and become more socially aware. They believe their research on therapeutic riding is just the beginning of more extensive research on equine-assisted activities and therapy that is needed to help veterans reintegrate into civilian life in the most efficient, smoothest way possible. When writing the article, the authors took a very scientific approach by conducting a controlled study and appealing to authorities such as different psychologists, psychiatrists, and US military experts.

Although Lanning and Krenek had a large amount of data and research in their experiment, there were a few flaws in the conduction of their study. In the article itself, the authors mention some of the limitations they had in their experiment and how it could be conducted better in the future. However, some of these limitations could affect the overall outcomes of the study. One of the flaws in this study is that most of the study is collecting subjective data. People have different baseline levels of what depression feels like, and each person has a different view of what emotional health is. This can skew the results of the study because there is no solid scale for measuring depression vs. emotional health. And as pointed out by the authors in the article, veterans are trained to be hardened against their feelings and mental

health issues are seen as signs of inadequacy. Therefore, veterans may not report their feelings in the way they actually feel. Another flaw in this study was also pointed out in the article. This is that the size of the group they were studying was too small and there was no control group to compare their results to. Thus, the data is exponential and may be just guessing for future outcomes. The amount of time they studied the group was very limited as well. 24 weeks is not enough time to fully overcome emotional problems. A better study would have been researching the effects of equine-assisted therapy over a year or more, to fully understand the recovery process of the individuals in the study.

Overall, the article was very enlightening and has some really great potential. Lanning and Krenok did a very good job at collecting data and reporting all sides of their research study, including the limitations they ran into. Even though there were flaws and setbacks to their study, it showed potential in the area of equine-assisted therapy and gave the basis for further research. All of the participants did report increased quality of life and social skills after their interventions. I see great potential in the use of equine-assisted activities and therapy, and I believe over time the programs can be refined and more research can be conducted to help veterans re-establish their civilian lives and overcome their post-traumatic stress in the most natural way possible.