

SUPPORT
for the
THINKING
RIDER

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Prescription for Equestrian Safety

The Equestrian Medical Safety Association (EMSA) is dedicated to the philosophy, principles and application of safety of people in equestrian activities. This purpose is achieved through education, research and resource.

MISSION STATEMENT

EDUCATION of health care professionals, organization representatives and individuals, including an emphasis on public awareness;

RESEARCH to better define injury patterns and risks, efficacy of safety measures and equipment, and assistance in equipment design;

A RESOURCE of experience and expertise to be shared and utilized for the benefit of equestrian safety.

IN THIS ISSUE

The Official SCDCTA Buzzkill's Response to Helmet Non-Belivers!	1
President's Letter	2
BOD Bio: Frederic Bouland..	2
Holding a Horse	3
11 Fire-Safety Precautions for Your Barn	4
Under Cover.....	5
Hippotherapy Incidents and Injury.....	6

The Official SCDCTA Buzzkill's Response to Helmet Non-Believers!

BY SUSAN S. QUINN, ESQ.

former R.N., P.A.-C, President of the South Carolina Dressage and Combined Training Association

As you should know by now, the USDF and the USEF have passed new safety helmet rules for eventing and dressage riders. (See the USDF and USEF websites for full texts of the new rules). Some will argue that the new rules don't go far enough and have loopholes. Others will argue that these rules merely represent "nanny state" intrusions into our private lives. It's a free country, and if we want to sustain head injuries with potential irreversible brain damage it's our God-given right to do so.

Whatever your view, it is axiomatic that riding is a dangerous sport, and even the best, most experienced riders are not invincible or immune from potential life-threatening or severely disabling injury. Each year thousands of riders find themselves in hospital emergency rooms with horse-related injuries. A sizeable percentage of these injuries involve the skull and brain.

Just as we know that riding can be an inherently dangerous activity, we also know that

ASTM/SEI certified helmets can prevent serious head injuries and save lives. Still, many riders shun the use of helmets. Maybe you're one of them. Maybe you're one of the thousands of risk-takers who use one or more of the following excuses for not wearing a helmet when you ride. If you are (and I know there are some of you out there), allow me to play the role of the official "SCDCTA Buzzkill" and try to refute some of the common helmet non-use alibis:

1). Helmets give me "helmet head hair."

Buzzkill response: If you think helmet head hair looks and feels bad, imagine how you'll look when your head has been shaved and your skull surgically drilled open for the brain surgery that may follow your fall. Wearing a helmet is not...I couldn't resist saying it...brain surgery.

2). Helmets are too hot to wear in South Carolina summers.

(please add, wahhhh, wahhh, wahhh to the end of this sentence when you read it.)

Buzzkill response: One severe fall and you may never remember another hot South Carolina summer again.

3). Other people at my barn don't wear helmets.

Buzzkill response: OK, remember how your mother used to say, "If everyone was jumping off a bridge, would you jump too?"

4). I'm not going to jump. I'm only going to ride on the flat.

Buzzkill response: Where in the rule book does it say that horses will only buck, rear, spook, bolt or act up when jumping and will be perfect angels at all times while being ridden on the flat?

5). My horse is totally trustworthy and has never done anything to cause me to fall off.

Buzzkill response: These words are the equivalent to a "kiss of death." Just as soon as you say them (or even think them!), your horse may prove you wrong.

Continued on page 3



Letter from the President

Deborah F. Stanitski, M.D.
EMSA President

and additional emphasis has been placed on lacrosse and soccer. A recent article in *USA Today* clearly pointed out the importance, complexity, and increased recovery often necessary in youth concussions. Concussion awareness has increased, and there is a focus not only on symptom recognition, but on pre-injury baseline assessment such as the IMPACT test. As an aside, IMPACT has generously offered a donation of \$1,000. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers an on-line course entitled "Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports" detailing the recognition of concussion in youths and what to do with identification of such an issue.

Unfortunately the riding world is not generally school-

or team-focused and remains comparatively small. The University of Kentucky, along with the state governor's wife, had developed an excellent program with a website (saddleupSAFE-LY.org) and multiple brochures now available on equine as well as human safety. Another excellent, head injury-specific, website/program is riders4helmets.com. Riders4helmets organized a huge helmet awareness campaign at the Kentucky Horse Park in July, 2010—the first Helmet Safety Symposium in Wellington (January 2011 video from a panel on our website) and a second Helmet Safety Symposium is planned for July 2011.

The Rolex this year was exciting as usual, dominated by Mary King of Great Britain, who took both first and second place on her two horses. In one weekend she has become the 2011 U.S. eventing "queen." The EMSA was fortunate to be granted space adjacent to the Charles Owens tent on sponsor row. In 2012, the EMSA will be joining both the EAF (Equestrian Aid Foundation) and Riders4Helmets with a presence in the Rolex Trade Fair.

The new EMSA website is a continuing work-in-progress. Ms. Jeffray Ryding is spearheading a fundraising campaign for this effort. Any contributions earmarked for this purpose would be much appreciated. The improved website, due to be functional by early 2012, plans to be more user-friendly, more attractive, and more 21st century.



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June 8, 2011

Dear Fellow Equine
Enthusiasts,

I am pleased to report that safety in general, specifically concussions, have been at the forefront in major newspapers (*NY Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*...) as well as on TV. Initially it appeared that the NFL was the most visible but this has expanded to the NHL, NBA and major league baseball. Recently there has been a focus on non-professional athletes,

Board of Directors Frederic Bouland



Federic Bouland is an instructor/coach/trainer/rider in Phoenix, Ariz., who rides at the *** level.

He was born and raised in France and moved to the USA in 1988 when he married Lorraine, who is from the US. Their son Sean is 16.

He is a reserve officer in the French army, a member of Area X council, an ICP instructor Level III and a member of the Professional Horsemen's Council.

Above: Aboard Le Favori.

Holding A Horse

Interests sought from the EMSA Membership

I would like to know your topics of interest for our newsletter.

Please send all correspondence to Debbie Stanitski; stanitsd@yahoo.com.

Thank you in advance for your interest.

Debbie Stanitski, MD



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It's a matter of safety, in the event that the horse moves swiftly and unexpectedly.

When one person is holding a horse and a second is working on the horse in some way—vet, farrier, grooming—they should both stand on the same side. This is especially important if it's a procedure that the horse might object to. If the horse moves suddenly, the person holding the lead line will most likely keep the head turned toward her, which will automatically cause the horse's body to swing the other way. If the two people are standing on opposite sides, this will cause the horse to bump up against the person working on the horse. If they're on the same side, then the horse's body should swing away from both of them, reducing the potential for injury.

SCDCTA Buzzkill's Response

Continued from page 1

6). Nothing bad is going to happen to me when I'm riding.

Buzzkill response: See #5's response above, and if you really believe this then you need to get a job as a psychic because if you can predict your future with that degree of certainty, you have a supernatural gift for the clairvoyant!

7). Only kids and amateurs need to wear helmets

Buzzkill response: If you think you're that invincible and that nothing harmful will befall you ever while on a horse because you are that great a rider, you are not only overrating your own abilities and underestimating your mount's ability to put you on the ground head first, but you are also seriously Charlie Sheen delusional.

I'm sure there are other equally silly reasons for not protecting your brain by wearing a helmet. If you can come up with additional ones, be grateful that your brain is still functioning well enough to let you think! Be grateful enough to protect it each and every time you get on a horse. This old Buzzkill wants you around and enjoying the sports of eventing and dressage for years to come!

11 Fire-Safety Precautions for Your Barn

Your barn houses precious cargo, so it's essential to protect it from fire hazards to prevent tragedy. Whether you own the farm or board, here are 11 easy ways you can make your barn a safer home for your horses by eliminating common fire risks.

1. Be careful with hay.

Hay should be stored away from the barn, because hay that was baled damp can heat up internally and ignite by itself. To check bales, break one open about a month after it is delivered. If the inside of the bale is very warm, the bale is probably getting ready to combust. If you must store your hay in the barn, store it on the ground level, if possible, and make sure the hay is far away from lights.

2. Make “No Smoking” the rule.

Smoking poses a dangerous fire hazard to your barn, so outlaw smoking on your farm for everyone. Post signs inside and outside the barn to make the policy clear to all visitors to your farm, whether family, friends or the farrier.

3. Protect wiring and lights.

Wiring and lights should be protected from both rodents and horses to prevent chewing, which can cause damage and create a hazard. Encase all wiring in metal conduit and secure the conduit so the horse cannot pull out the wiring. Toys may help keep a meddling horse's interest elsewhere. Light bulbs should be covered with a metal or plastic cage to prevent them



Cobwebs are extremely flammable and can spread fire easily.
DUSTY PERIN PHOTO, www.dustyperin.com

from contacting dust, cobwebs or other flammables.

4. Break up bedding.

When mucking stalls, move the bedding around and break up any compaction caused by your horse walking around in his stall. Fire will not spread as fast through loose bedding.

5. Remove flammables.

Go through all supplies stored in the barn and check if any labels read “flammable.” If so, store these items away from the barn or in a fire-resistant container, like a metal box. Park any gas-powered equip-

ment in a separate area, and remove any paint cans.

6. Clear out clutter.

A clean barn not only looks nice, but it can help prevent the spread of fire. Clutter in the corners of tack and feed rooms is fodder for a fire, so clean out any dirt and organize any wayward tack or supplies. Your aisle should be neat to provide a wide passage to evacuate horses in the event of a fire.

7. Sweep clean.

Dirt, bedding, hay and manure that build up in the barn aisle is a fire risk. If material

comes into contact with a hot surface, like the muffler of a truck or utility vehicle you've backed in, it could smolder and possibly cause a fire.

8. Knock down cobwebs.

Cobwebs are extremely flammable and can spread fire easily. Regularly remove them from all parts of your barn, especially the rafters.

9. Use caution with extension cords.

If you must have extension cords, use only the heavy-duty industrial-rated cords, and unplug and store them as soon as you finish. If any hay or dust falls in between the plug and the receptacle of an extension cord connection, the electric current can cause a fire that smolders for hours and then breaks out later. Never hang an extension cord on a nail, as the metal can abrade the rubber coating of the cord.

10. Move your manure.

Manure and soiled bedding are flammable materials that can spontaneously combust in hot, dry weather and subsequently burn for a very long time. Dump your manure at a safe distance from your barn.

11. Prepare for the worst.

Create—and practice—an evacuation plan for your barn. Accustom all horses to being blindfolded, be sure the driveway is clearly marked and accessible for emergency vehicles, and install and properly maintain fire extinguishers throughout the facility.

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UNDER COVER

BY SUSHIL D. WENHOLZ

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It's been a year since Olympic dressage rider Courtney King-Dye fell from a horse, fractured her skull, and landed in a coma. The incident sparked an unprecedented focus on protective headgear, which King-Dye was not wearing at the time of her accident. Since then, at all levels of the sport, helmets are becoming an increasingly common sight in the US dressage world. If you're among the many who are ready to strap one on, we'll get you started with tips on what to look for in safety features, styles for schooling and show, fit, and more. Certification: Get the Real Deal The first and most important feature to look for in equestrian protective headgear is ASTM/SEI certification, denoted by a seal from the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI). Certification indicates that the helmet meets or exceeds standards set forth by the ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials). It's the only way to know for sure that you're purchasing an actual safety helmet, not simply a look-alike that won't provide

protection when you need it. "[This] system of certification assures a rider that the product must pass independent testing at internationally recognized labs, must pass a stringent quality-assurance program, and that the company maintains liability insurance for the life of their products," says Drusilla "Dru" Malavase, of Bloomfield, NY, a former American Horse Shows Association (now US Equestrian Federation) dressage technical delegate and a dressage rider who is also a longtime equestrian safety advocate. She chaired the committee that wrote the first US equestrian-safety standard and convened the first ASTM subcommittee, of which she has been chair or co-chair ever since. She currently chairs the New York State Horse Council Safety Committee. To find a list of helmet models that are ASTM/SEI approved, go to seinet.org, click on "Certified Products," and then select "Equestrian Helmets."

Functional Features

Once you're certain you're looking at bona fide protective headgear, you'll still have plentiful models from which to choose. Considering these key features can help narrow your choices: Retention system (harness). The retention system serves one purpose: to keep your helmet on your head during a fall. Retention systems come in a variety of colors, materials, and padding, with different methods of adjustment, notes Malavase. Fit, which we'll discuss later, is the most impor-

tant trait; beyond that, select a harness that you find attractive and comfortable.

Visor.

Malavase believes that most dressage riders will prefer a helmet with a visor, which today are often flexible to various degrees. Visors may be attached either permanently or with snaps or hook-and-loop tape. At least one helmet model sports an extra-wide visor designed to help shade your face from the sun. If you prefer a helmet without a visor, you can still achieve a traditional look for the show ring by using a visored helmet cover.

Ventilation.

According to Malavase, ventilation features have improved tremendously over the past two decades—good news for those who remember the hot, enclosed helmets of yesteryear. Some models have quite obvious external ventilation, like mesh-covered vents, which lend a sportier, high-tech look; others have subtle internal systems for a more traditional appearance. When comparing helmets, consider your own heat-tolerance level as well as your environment. For instance, if you get warm simply wearing a baseball cap while riding or if you live in a warm climate, you may prefer an ultra-ventilated style.

Padding and liner.

Most certified helmets have some type of padding and may also have a sweat liner. Both

contribute to fit as well as comfort, says Malavase. Many models come with pads that can be inserted or removed to create a customized fit. Some helmets have liners that can be removed for washing. At least one manufacturer offers styles featuring a "headband" embedded with silver ions for antimicrobial protection.

General comfort.

Let's face it, you're more likely to wear a helmet if it's comfortable. So start trying some on, suggests Jayne Hickey, a dressage rider and owner of Greenway Saddlery, which caters to amateur and professional equestrians through a store in Scottsdale, AZ, and a mobile unit. Don't simply go by what's popular or what your friends are wearing. "Some brands run more oval in shape and some more round," Hickey explains. "Riders must choose the one that fits their head shape best." Schooling vs. Show Hickey has seen a sharp increase in the number of dressage riders—especially juniors/young riders and adults (both pros and amateurs) competing on green horses—purchasing ASTM/SEI-approved helmets for schooling and competition. (Many FEI-level riders school and warm up in helmets, but most still switch to a top hat before competing, she acknowledges.) For schooling, says Hickey, riders generally prefer lighter-weight helmets with streamlined profiles and ample ventilation. (Thankfully, with

today's many design advances, we don't see the "mushroom head" styling any more, she adds.) Schoolers may opt to have a little fun with color, as well. For showing, faux-suede-covered helmets in black or dark navy are the most popular, Hickey says. Traditional velvet-covered models are also available in certified styles.

If you don't want to purchase two helmets, you can simply top your schooler with a velveteen cover on show days. But if you choose to buy a separate show helmet, ride in it at home several times before your first competition, advises Malavase. "A new helmet molds itself to your head a bit with several uses and will be more comfortable at that show—less of a distraction," she says.

Get Fit

Even the best protective headgear can't do its job if it doesn't fit correctly. Here are some tips from Malavase, Hickey, and the Troxel helmets Web site (troxelhelmets.com) to help you get it right.

1. Measure.

Measure the circumference of your head, just above your ears and across your forehead. You can usually find sizing charts on manufacturers' Web sites and on helmet packaging. Select the size that most closely matches your head size.

2. Fix your hair.

When trying on helmets, wear your hair in your usual riding style.

3. Level it.

Put the helmet on so that it sits about an inch above your eyebrows, with the vi-

sor parallel to the floor, so the helmet is level on your head. If you put your hand on top of the helmet and rock it front to back, your eyebrows should move up and down.

4. Test it.

Without fastening the harness, the helmet should feel snug but not too tight. Keep it on for a little while; it should get more comfortable, not give you a headache. Move your head left to right, then up and down; shake your head; bend over and stand up. A properly fitting helmet should stay in place.

5. Harness up.

Fasten the harness. Adjust the straps if needed so that they fit snugly, making contact with your jaw and allowing space for just one to two fingers underneath. Try the yawn test: If you yawn widely, you should feel the helmet pull down on your head.

6. Adjust it.

Some helmets boast adjustability features, like special dials or the padding systems mentioned earlier, that can help you fine-tune the fit. These can also be handy for growing kids or if you might wear your hair either up or down when you ride.

7. For kids only.

Buy your child a helmet that fits today; never choose a too-large model for him or her to "grow into." Don't worry, helmets aren't like shoes: Children typically change head sizes only twice before reaching their adult size, says Mala-

vase, so you won't have to purchase a new helmet every year. Look for models designed especially for kids. There are plenty of fun helmet covers available that can make any helmet more appealing to a youngster, as well.

New Traditions

That stylish, well-fitting helmet won't do you any good if you leave it in the tack room. Malavase, for one, encourages all riders to strap one on every time they put a foot in the stirrup. "Studies show that riding accidents happen to riders of all ages, levels of expertise, and on the very best- (and worst)-trained horses," she says. "A head injury is a life-altering event not only for the rider, but also for all the other people in their lives. If the choice is between tradition and good sense, it is time to make a new and safer tradition." To that end, the US Equestrian Federation passed a protective-headgear rule at its 2011 convention in January. The rule requires all competitors riding at Fourth Level and below, and all riders under the age of eighteen regardless of level, to wear protective headgear at national-level dressage shows. So the protective-headgear trend is now the rule for most competitors.

→*Colorado-based equine journalist Sushil Dulai Wenholtz enjoys all types of riding and competes in dressage, hunter/jumper, and eventing. She is a big believer in the "every time, every ride" helmet philosophy, and you won't catch her in the saddle without her trusty (and ASTM-approved!) headgear.*

By the Numbers: Head Injuries and Protective Headgear

Of the approximately 77,000 emergencyroom visits per year by equestrians, 15 percent (about 11,500) are head injuries, and most are to unhelmeted riders. Including unmounted injuries, 10.6 percent of injuries were related to dressage competitions. Of the sports and recreational activities that are linked to head injuries, horseback riding ranked number 11 in 2009. Horseback riding resulted in 11.7 percent of all traumatic brain injuries in recreational sports from 2001 to 2005—the highest of any athletic activity. Of the fatalities caused by equestrian activity—95 US deaths in 2009 alone—60 percent are from head injuries. Equestrian-related deaths have dropped by half since the ASTM standard went into effect. The US Pony Clubs lowered its head-injury rate by 29 percent after mandating helmet use. After protective-headgear design improved and was widely adopted, Britain's hospital admission rate for equestrians fell 46 percent. Sources: Dru Malavase, American Association of Neurological Surgeons, Riders4Helmets.com, American Riding Instructors Association.

Helmet Care and Handling

Equestrian-safety expert Dru Malavase offers these tips on caring for your helmet to maximize its longevity:

- To avoid damaging extremes of temperature and air quality, store the helmet in your home, not in a tack room. Don't leave it in a car with the windows rolled up, either.
- Keep bug sprays (both human and equine) away from the helmet, as they can melt and pit the liner.
- Follow the manufacturer's advice about cleaning; some chemicals can do more harm than good.
- Keep your helmet's owner's manual, which will include fitting and care instructions as well as information on a replacement policy, if any. Some manufacturers offer a reduced price on a replacement helmet if yours is damaged in a fall. To take advantage of it, you'll most likely need to register your original helmet, know the model, and save your receipt.
- Manufacturers may recommend replacing a helmet after a certain period of time, often five or six years, regardless of usage. ASTM/SEI helmets should contain their date of manufacture—helpful in determining how long a particular helmet sat on a store shelf or in a warehouse before you purchased it.



JENNIFER BRYANT

Who's Using the Old Noggin?

Even elite riders are getting on the protective-headgear bandwagon.

- 2010 World Equestrian Games individual bronze medalist Steffen Peters wore a helmet in the WEG warm-ups and during his Grand Prix Freestyle medal victory gallop.
- Olympians Jacqueline Brooks of Canada and Sue Blinks of the US are two high-profile riders who have committed to wearing protective headgear in competition.
- FEI-level riders Heather Blitz and Kim Gentry wore helmets in the warm-up and in competition at last year's Dressage at Devon (PA) CDI.
- Olympians and dressage legends Lendon Gray, Robert Dover, and numerous others have pledged their support to the Riders4Helmets campaign.

Human Incidents and Injury within the Hippotherapy Milieu:

Four Years of Safety Study Data of Risk, Risk Management, and Occurrences

REBECCA COOK OTR, HPCS

Thank you to all who took the time over these four years and have participated in answering survey questions!

Introduction

- The introduction of a Research Review paper from Spinal Cord¹ claims “Injuries are an inevitable consequence of horse riding” and the conclusion of this same paper asserts “Horse riding is a dangerous sport.”
- Equine liability laws² define “inherent risk” with equine activity due to equine propensity that can cause harm and unpredictability of equine reaction.
- The American Medical Equestrian Association (now the EMSA) believes records of horse-related human accidents provide means to learn about prevention but most activities do not keep records of injuries and studies seek different information with no agreement of what should be reported making comparison difficult.³
- Does the risk of an equine milieu outweigh the benefits? Is hippotherapy a safe treatment option? Public perception of equine risk and the deficiency of safety research specific to hippotherapy is capable of impacting research approval, insurance coverage, client referrals and more.

Study Aims

1. Determine prevalence of hippotherapy incidents and injury.
2. Identify primary risk management strategies utilized by providers.
3. Represent results of a consistent and ongoing reporting tool for hippotherapy safety data.

Method

Online Survey

Survey Monkey was utilized for data collection:

Responses were anonymous to encourage participation but also limited to one per internet address to prevent data duplication.

- The survey consisted of 18 questions: (2) open-ended + (16) forced response.
- Survey questions collected data on credentials, experience, number of hippotherapy treatments per year, therapist training, risk management policies, emergency procedures, occurrence rate and record of human incident or injury.
- Each year represents four separate surveys with relevant information collected over a 2-month period starting in December for the given year and ending in January.
- Content of the questions remained unchanged for all collection years.

- Survey data collection is planned to remain ongoing.

STUDY RESULTS

Definition of Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy is a professional treatment strategy utilizing equines and employed by credentialed therapists (OT, PT and SLP) having a strong background in movement analysis and additional knowledge of the influence of equine motion. Common practice from all years of survey respondents showed approximately 2/3 working out of a NARHA center and 1/3 in private practice. Year after year, the top equipment utilized in sessions was a bareback pad, halter, and lead rope.

Survey Data

- Each survey year remained fairly consistent with type of respondents: 1/3 OT, 1/2 PT, 1/10 SLP and the remaining (3%) were administrators. These numbers correspond closely to AHA (American Hippotherapy Association) membership by discipline, demonstrating a representative sample.
- Approximately 90% of respondents were members of AHA and approximately 80% of respondents were members of NARHA (www.narha.org).
- N = Number of Total Survey Respondents per year:
2007 N=131; 2008 N=142; 2009 N=28; 2010 N=124

Top 3 Risks by Year	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
2007	Equine behavior	Weather conditions	Not enough help
2008	Equine behavior	Weather conditions	Not enough help
2009	Equine behavior	Not enough help	Weather conditions
2010	Equine behavior	Weather conditions	Not enough help

Top 3 Risk Management	#1 Strategy	#2 Strategy	#3 Strategy
2007	3-way tie: orientation to HPOT rules	3-way tie: screened & trained equines	3-way tie: Extreme weather conditions
2008	Staff Orientation	Screened & trained equines	Orientation to HPOT roles
2009	Screened & trained equines	Orientation to HPOT roles	Staff orientation
2010	Screen & trained equines	Staff orientation	Extreme weather conditions

	2007	2008	2009	2010
# of Tx sessions represented	46,656 (mean=356 per therapist)	48,053 (mean=338 per therapist)	10,086 (mean=360 per therapist)	39,060 (mean=315 per therapist)
# Emergency dismounts	127 (1x per 367 Tx) 49% had <i>no</i> emergency dismounts	148 (1x per 325 Tx) 52% had <i>no</i> emergency dismounts	40 (1x per 252 Tx) 39% had <i>no</i> emergency dismounts	111 (1x per 352 Tx) 56% had <i>no</i> emergency dismounts
# of Incidents reported that required more than basic first aid	17 (1 every 2744 Tx) -8x horse nip, 4x kick, 2x stepped on, 1x bumped, 2x strain during client assist	11 (1 every 4368 Tx) -3x horse bite, 4x kick, 2x bumped, 1x stepped on, and 1x strain with client assist	5 (1 every 2017 Tx) 2x horse bite, 1 kick 2x horse spook	6 (1 every 6510 Tx) -2x horse nip, 2x stepped on foot, 2x guided fall w/ no injury
# of Injuries reported that required more than basic first aid	4 (1 out of 11,664 Tx) -All were session assistants: stepped on 3x and cut 1x and all went to doctor on own	3 (1 out of 16,018 Tx) -Client fell during mount transfer 2x and client spooked horse 1x w/1 hospital stay and all returned to hippotherapy	1 (1 out of 10,086 Tx) -Therapist sprained ankle and went to doctor onown	2 (1 out of 19,530 Tx) -Therapist injured positioning client; went to emergency room w/dx of shoulder bursitis and 1 client bruised and chose not to return to hippotherapy

Other Considerations

The National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) provides the only national figures available on horse-related injuries that go to hospital emergency rooms and medical personnel may not know or be interested in the events involved in the injury⁵. This would make it difficult to determine hippotherapy incidents from the NEISS data system.

A Cambridge University study showed the relationship of one injury for 100 hours of leisure riding⁴ and most were contusions or abrasions (28.7%) and fractures (28.6%) with concussions accounting for 4-8% of injuries⁵. NEISS reports that only 4% of persons injured during contact with horses require hospitalization⁶. The US Pony Club estimates in 5 years, only 150 injuries occurred among a population of 46,351 riders aged 6 to 21 years and most of these injuries were bruises and abrasions⁶ (1 per 309 riders).

Markel insurance (a primary insurer for the equine assisted

activities and therapy industry) when asked about incidents and injury, would not disclose numbers, but admitted incidence was very low and in four years, no survey respondent had liability claims.

Summary and Conclusion

Equine Behavior was identified as the top risk and most incidents resulted from horse nips or bites, a horse kick, stepping on a foot, or bumping a person at a mean rate of 1 incident per 3,689 sessions. Staff, rather than clients, were most frequently involved with equine incidents and required no more than basic first aid.

Top risk management strategies were screening and training hippotherapy equines, orientation for staff to hippotherapy roles and cancellation of therapy during extreme weather. Emergency dismounts are completed by about 50% of surveyed therapists and the mean average is 1 emergency dismount per every 338 sessions.

Four years of survey data represent 143,855 hippotherapy sessions correlating to a mean injury rate of 1 per 14,386 hippotherapy sessions. In four years, the 10 reported injuries requiring further medical assistance occurred from an equine stepping on a foot, client falls, and therapist body mechanics assisting clients. Six of the ten injury occurrences were with staff. Two client injuries were bruising or occurred from a fall, and two were mounting injury.

Gleaning common practice from the survey shows hippotherapy occurring in an enclosed area with a trained horse, a trained horse handler and client assistance. Hippotherapy injury rate (1/14,386) is significantly lower compared with recreational riders (1/100). In four survey years, no injury resulted in a liability insurance claim.

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Note:

The first 2 years of survey data were displayed in a poster presentation in 2009 at the American Hippotherapy Association national conference: http://www.sponsorfund.org/images/safety_poster.jpg

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