



Horses for Body, Mind and Soul

13th International Congress of Therapeutic Riding [TR]

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The 13th International Congress of TR was held in Muenster, Germany from August 12 -15, 2009. The old university city of Muenster is the centre of Germany's horse world and was therefore an ideal choice to stage the Congress and the Gala Horseshow. Eight hundred congress participants from 39 countries came to Muenster to share their knowledge and further their understanding of “*Horses for Body, Mind and Soul*”, the healing effect of the horse for humans.

The German Kuratorium together with the Federation of Riding for the Disabled [FRDI] was responsible for the scientific program and the organisation.

During the four days specialists and practitioners of TR made over 150 presentations, most of them half an hour in duration. The day started with a one and a half hour presentation by keynote speakers who were very familiar with TR. The theme “*Horses for Body, Mind and Soul*” was elaborated on by every keynote speaker.

On day one Professor Schmidt presented a review on evaluation/studies in TR and areas of expected effect. He is a board member of the International Society of Child and Youth Psychiatry and is indeed well qualified to address this topic as his latest research focused on the evaluations and effects of the different therapy methods.

On day two Professor Hoelter addressed the “Opportunities and Limitations in the Concept of Reciprocal Relation between Humans and Horses in Therapy.”

On day three the Swiss Professor Turner’s subject was “Ethics in Human-Animal Relation.” As President of the international association of Human–Animal Interaction Organization [IAHAIO] since 1995 and President of the Swiss institute IEMT he is well versed in this topic [IAHAIO = International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organization and IEMT= Interdisziplinäre Forschung der Mensch-Tier Beziehung or translated: Interdisciplinary Study of Human-Animal Relationship].

Professor Ohlbrich, as the fourth keynote speaker, spoke about the “Relationship with Horses throughout Life and its Influence on the Development of the Human”. He particularly stressed the healing effect of horses on humans of all ages.

Gundula Hauser as President of the Federation of Riding for the Disabled International [FRDI] also emphasized the healing effect in her address during the opening ceremony, welcoming 800 visitors from 39 nations.

I enjoyed all keynote speakers, who illustrated their talks with photos and graphics [power point]; they mostly spoke English. The content of their chosen topics encouraged discussion and reflection. Much discussion took place during the coffee and lunch breaks, where contacts were made and in my case re-established.

The topic "*Horses for Body Mind and Soul*" was addressed not only by the keynote speakers but also by the presenters and the live demonstrations/workshops and case reports.

The Kuratorium grouped the scientific program under the following headings:

- Hippotherapy [43]
- Remedial work with horses [46]
- Riding as sport for people with disabilities [22]
- Occupational Therapy with the horse [3]

- Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy - EFP [31]
- Additional topics for Equine Assisted Therapy - EAT [22]
- Therapeutic horses [11]

The days were quite full, keynote speakers spoke from 9-10:30 a.m. followed by half-hour presentations 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and in the afternoon from 2-5:30 p.m. The main hall and five or six lecture rooms were used. Luckily the rooms were quite close together. Having to choose which presentations to attend was almost intimidating, so I tried to find a balance of familiar and new topics.

What did I learn?

A few comments on some session:

Professor Schmidt, as pointed out in his keynote address, feels strongly that often research is not truly scientific, a problem that needs to be addressed. Frequently the numbers are too small and the control group insufficient or non-existent. He believes that results should be measurable. Results often show “what people want to see.”

Hippotherapy

Under the Hippotherapy heading, the MS case study pointed out that hippotherapy deserves more attention in the symptomatic treatment of MS. Hippotherapy showed a positive effect on the participants' gait, walking capacity and endurance as compared to the control group. For a Friedrich's Ataxia client, the use of the bareback pad for four months before using the saddle showed great improvement.

In her respiratory study Beth Macauley tested the effects of hippotherapy on speech. Eighty-five percent of the 27 participants had immediate improvement in airflow and speech coordination following the hippotherapy session. Nineteen actually reached normal levels. In the study from “Hippotherapy to Rein Control” a client who also had regular physical therapy [CP Spastic Diplegia] progressed from being back-ridden for one year [1999] to independence ten years later. While still on a vaulting surcingle she

could ride a simple test in 2007. The carry-over into her daily life, her improvement in perception, orientation and movements, allows her to take control of her own life.

Another speaker stressed that when practicing hippotherapy long-reining was more beneficial for the client than simple leading of the horse. Having horses work over ground poles was a useful training method and improved their gait.

Remedial work with horses

A good number of speakers addressed this topic, an internationally popular topic. Ireland had a report on an eight-week program with positive results. Brazil's presenter gave a case study of three children with ADHD, who also showed improvement in general school performance such as attention span and ability to concentrate. Cooperation between parents, teachers and riders was stressed as well as the need for clear decisive teaching.

Several German speakers presented reports on Remedial Vaulting, giving ideas on program content. [Gisela Rhodes' book "Hello Bob + 49 Other Interactive Vaulting Games" is available at: www.fairridefarm.com.

The most encouraging news concerned Muenster itself, where the Muenster school psychologist is able to arrange with 14 local stables [riding clubs] and 35 schools that 280 children can have remedial educational vaulting in the school year 2009/10, once a week during school hours. The teachers are certified German Remedial Vaulting instructors who often are teachers in the schools. Funding for transport is also organized. Teachers work with the riding clubs who provide the vaulting horse. Groups of four to six students are the norm.

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy [EFP]

The use of the horse in the treatment of different psychosomatic problems has certainly increased since the eighties and nineties. Dr. Barbara Kluever uses horses in group

therapy, facilitating awareness of self and exploring relationships. Psychotherapeutic riding is included in the treatment concept of a hospital for psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychosomatic therapy. Once a week a group of four adult riders with psychosomatic sickness had TR sessions at an outside riding facility. They appreciated being physically close to the horse which gave them trust and support. They became more aware of their own bodies and movements. Experiences were shared by giving feedback to each other and the therapist.

In a Spanish case study, a group of three clients with schizophrenia were given well-structured TR lessons. Over the two years, progress was made. They are now able to clean and prepare the horse, can adapt themselves to the demands of different activities, participate actively, and are motivated to achieve good results. It was important that the patients understood the objectives and were able to share their feelings with others and the therapist.

Dr. Shoshanna Pollock [Canada] presented a pilot project using TR for persons with addiction. Five adults participated in the twelve-week addiction treatment program, some keen, some sceptical, all volunteered for treatment. All gained confidence, they had a sense of purpose, and they gained insight into their own feelings and addiction. Dr. Pollock, who is EAGALA trained, stressed that more research is needed using TR for person with trauma, addiction and incarceration (EAGALA = Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association).

Equine Assisted Therapy [EAT] - Additional Topics

A number of topics were grouped under this heading such as: the “Holistic Approach,” making us aware that in all treatment methods the physical, the cognitive and the emotional is present. EAT can be used by various therapists [PT, OT, Movement Therapist, etc.] to improve locomotion, neuromotricity, sensory integration with and on the horse. “Horses and Mindfulness“, with roots based in meditation, was presented by the Belgian speaker. Mindfulness skills [non–judging, patience, mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, letting go] and the relationships with horses can teach us about healing

and serenity. The horse program was linked to the meditation class. The program focused on attitudinal factors.

Note

Further presentations were given by two Canadians: Carolyn Miller, PhD and Kortney LaRock, Ottawa University student. Carolyn's topics were: "An Approach Based on the Autonomic Nervous System [ANS]". The second was a case study of an eight-week program "Interdisciplinary Experience in Community Health". It was unfortunate that I had to miss the talk, but I would like to suggest that their work can be used at a future CanTRA or OnTRA clinic.

Organizational and horse subjects were also covered

Britain [Fortune Centre] presented a pilot project that provided instructor and horse training at the same time. The instructor with an assistant instructor [AI], a volunteer and in some cases the rider planned the horse's program and the training/work schedule for all each week. Although this was time-consuming because of regular meetings/evaluations, there were definite benefits. The interest in the training of horse and assistant instructor grew and the quality of lessons improved. They trusted one another and kept reports. Three out of four groups were very successful by the end of the year.

The Dutch group presented a project regarding planning for quality. They felt that overall the national TR program needs a lift. They decided to get experts/specialists together. Therapists, riding instructors, teachers and social workers were asked to come up with an improved program for TR in the Netherlands. No one was allowed to leave for 30 hours, they did get fed. A calendar for implementation was set. Their first goal was to establish more remedial vaulting programs. Other goals are set for 2010.

Workshops and Demonstrations

Klaus Balkenhol, of Olympic fame, demonstrated how to "Create Trust in Therapy Horses." During the one and a half hour demonstration we saw young horses and Para riders schooling the horses. His message: take your time, use an older horse to give the young a security blanket, take it slowly, never use force and get the horses used to applause. We all followed his direction carefully. He advised all to "establish a relationship with the horse/horses in your care."

Another workshop, organized by Angela Bauersfeld, allowed adults the experience of sitting and feeling the movement of a vaulting horse. The obedient 17 hands-high horse with two pads and surcingle helped more than 20 people discover the movements Angela's students' experience: sitting front, back and side-saddle in walk and trot. Angela is one of the TR teachers who also run a TR program once a week from school. I participated as translator.



The scientific papers were all very inviting and it was impossible to go to all those which interested me. I found the variety of approaches stimulating.

Poster Exhibition and Equipment

Over 30 posters from many countries from far and wide were also displayed. Canada was represented by Danielle Champagne's poster on "Postural control with Down syndrome children". Saddles and vaulting girths were displayed for purchase or orders, while the back massage machine was popular with congress visitors. I enjoyed the book display from the German Equestrian Assn. [FN Verlag] and bought in English "Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy." It is a collection of 13 case studies. It contains presentations from Germany, USA, Finland and the Netherlands. It can be purchased from the FN Verlag: www.fnverlag.com and also see www.dkthr.de

An Update on Federation of Riding for the Disabled International [FRDI]



One afternoon I attended the FRDI meeting where voting for new Board members was the main objective. The new Board for 2009-2012 will come from five continents:

- President: Pauline Perry [Australia],
- Vice president: Jennifer Dixon-Clegg [Britain],
- Treasurer: Professor Anne O'Shallie [USA],

Directors:

- Yvonne Dzwonkrinska [Poland],
- Kerstin Offtermatt [Austria],
- Uta Rindfleisch-Wu [Taiwan]

Secretary for FRDI : Gisela Rhodes, ED [USA], e-mail: office@frdi.net

The next congress will be in held in Greece in 2012.

The new committee told us that it will endeavour to:

1. Assist existing groups to grow and improve
2. Assist new organisations
3. Distribute and challenge to search for research/knowledge
4. Improve international communications
5. Increase public awareness of FRDI
6. Improve committee work
7. Re-organise the journal and newsletter
8. Promote instructor schools
9. Increase financial resources
10. Update the FRDI website.

Social and Horse Events

The Kuratorium had organised two social/horse events which were enjoyed by all. One evening we had a Westphalian supper in Warendorf which is the most important horse stable in Germany. The state stud and riding school, training centre and offices of the German Equestrian Association are there as well. The tours of the facilities were most impressive as was the gala show held in the Muenster congress arena. Conduct a Google search with the word Warendorf for further information.



The Gala Show was indeed the highlight of the week. The evening consisted of 16 show numbers, emphasizing the harmony and cooperation between man and horse. Integration of all abilities and equestrian skills was the order of the day. The story of the Little Prince, with children from Dortmund and Muenster led by their TR teacher, held all the various demonstrations together.



The Stallion Quadrilles, the various intricate Kuers of Para rider, young riders and young stallions, the driving, the humorous show number of the rider with its cold-blood stallion [see photo] were all breathtaking.

One of the show numbers stood out four well-behaved dogs that herded goats, while a rider mounted on a stallion gave subtle commands. For three and a half hours we were entertained by the highest quality of horsemanship.

The preparation and organization, e.g., getting the correct footing into the arena and the stabling must have been difficult and costly. The German Kuratorium was most fortunate to find sponsors who supported the congress but also the Gala Show.

The Gold sponsors were the Nuernberger Insurance Group while the Georgsmarienhuetten, GmbH were Bronze sponsors. "Lebenshilfe Nuernberg" as well as several "Sparkassen" [saving banks] also supported the congress.

The cost to attend the congress was Euro 290, [350 for late comers], about \$450. Meals, coffee breaks, hotel were not included. [We learned to refill the plastic bottle from the hotel room tap] Still, I felt it was all worth it. It was good to see how TR has grown and diversified over the years since my first visit to an FRDI congress in 1982. Now many more people in countries far and wide can be helped through TR to *improve their quality of life*. I enjoyed all the lectures and demonstrations, the discussions with old and new friends.

The Canadian Foundation for Animal Assisted Support Services grant to [TROtt](#) helped reduce the cost of attending the 13th International Congress of Therapeutic Riding.

Save your pennies, people, so you can be at the FRDI congress in 2012 in Greece!

Note

For more detailed information contact me at leliaspon@sympatico.ca or go to the following web sites www.frdi.net or www.dkthr. I also would like to thank Debbie Silkwood-Sherer for sending photos from the horse show and Marion Takeuchi for editing this report.