

Developing and evaluating an assessment template for equine welfare investigations

Kaylee McCabe, Kathryn Proudfoot, Henrik Stryhn, Jennifer Burns, Charlene VanLeeuwen,
Kathleen MacMillan

Department of Health Management, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI,
Canada (McCabe, Proudfoot, Stryhn, Burns, MacMillan)
Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada
(VanLeeuwen)

When investigating equine welfare concerns, regulatory investigators rely on veterinarians to assess horses' body condition, care level, and living conditions. However, research and resources for training students on how to write high quality welfare reports is minimal. This study aimed to 1) create a template for equine welfare reports based on requirements of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines (Code), and 2) determine the effect of the template on veterinary student confidence and willingness to assess equine welfare cases, as well as their knowledge of equine welfare, after completing a virtual case. Fourteen fourth year Atlantic Veterinary College students completed a virtual equine welfare case and wrote a welfare report. Students were split into two groups: one wrote the report with the template and one without. All were given the Code, as well as pre- and post-case surveys. Surveys posed three questions on their confidence (question 1) and willingness (question 2) to assess equine welfare cases, as well as their knowledge of equine welfare (question 3) from 1 to 10 (e.g., not confident to extremely confident, etc.). Using Mann Whitney U tests, we found no significant differences in changes between pre- and post-surveys in those with and without templates for confidence ($p=0.784$), willingness ($p=0.840$), and knowledge ($p=0.820$). Our findings suggest a template alone is not enough to enhance these aspects of veterinary education. Students may benefit from further educational experiences evaluating equine welfare to improve upon these variables. As a next step, student reports will be compared to an experienced veterinarian's report to assess their ability to correctly identify welfare concerns.

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