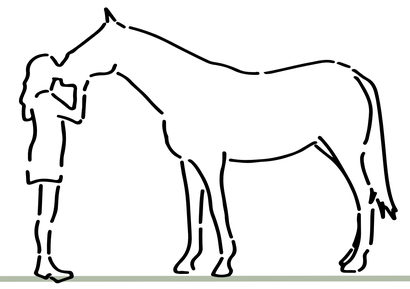
Assessing the effectiveness of a welfare assessment template for generating reports of equine investigations

Kaylee McCabe[1], Kathryn Proudfoot[1], Henrik Stryhn[1], Jennifer Burns[1], Charlene VanLeeuwen[2], Kathleen MacMillan[1].

[1]*Department of Health Management, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada.*
[2]*Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada.*



Introduction

- When investigating equine welfare concerns, regulators often rely on veterinarians to assess horses' body condition, level of care, and living conditions.
- Resources for training veterinary students on how to write these welfare reports is minimal.
- To aid veterinarians in writing these reports, a template was developed based on the National Farm Animal Care Council Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines (Code of Practice).

Objectives

1. 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 equine welfare case.
2. Determine the students' ability to correctly determine non-compliance with the Code of Practice, with and without using a template.

Methodology

Data Collection

- 19 fourth year Atlantic Veterinary College DVM students participated in 3 teaching sessions.
- All participants were provided the Code of Practice and two surveys (pre- & post-case).
  - Surveys included a self-reported scale of 1 to 10 for: 1) knowledge of equine welfare, 2) confidence, and 3) willingness to conduct a welfare assessment.
- 10 participants received the template ("Treatment") and 9 did not ("Control"), by random assignment within pairs of students with similar equine experience level.
- All participants submitted a written welfare report individually.

Data Analysis

- All reports were compared with an expert report written by a trained veterinarian
  - The number of Code of Practice violations identified by participants were compared with the 26 violations identified by the expert.

- Friedman tests assessed pre- and post-survey differences for treatment and control groups.
- Logistic and Poisson regression analyses evaluated differences in the number of violations in reports between groups.

6.2.1 Handling and Restraint Equipment

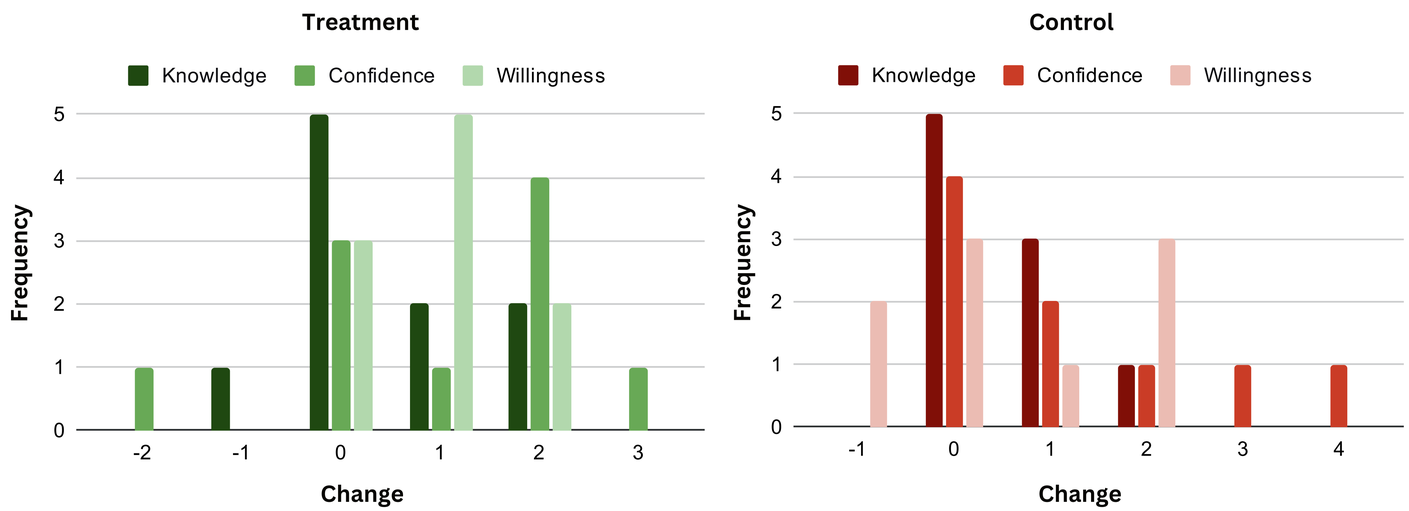
COMPLIANT			SECTION 6.2.1 REQUIREMENTS
YES	NO	N/A	
	✓		Tethering must not cause injury and must only be used if the horse is under supervision. The person applying the tether must be knowledgeable in its use. *Section 6.2.1* provides an explanation of tethers.

Figure 1. Excerpt of the welfare assessment template.

Results

- **No significant differences were found (p>0.05).**

Figure 2. Frequency of changes between pre- and post-survey scores for knowledge, confidence, and willingness.



	True Violations	False Violations
Treatment	13.9 (8-20)	0.9 (0-3)
Control	15.6 (9-19)	1.3 (0-6)

Table 1. The mean values (range) of true Code of Practice violations (non-compliance identified by the expert, out of 26) and false Code of Practice violations (non-compliance was *not* identified by the expert) from student reports.

Conclusions

- There were no significant differences in the change in participant confidence, willingness, and knowledge between those with and without a template.
- The ability to identify the same welfare concerns as an expert varied between students, both with and without a template.
- As the template alone was not sufficient to affect participant's reports, students may benefit from further educational opportunities evaluating equine welfare to help increase their knowledge, willingness and confidence to conduct equine welfare investigations.

Scan to view the entire welfare assessment template!

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