

Introduction

The problem of back related problems amongst horses is well reported (Gomez Alvarez 2008; vanWeeren & Back, 2004) with contributing factors including rider weight, saddle, girth problems (de COCQ, *et al* 2004) equipment and training risk factors, foot care and shoeing regime (Hokenhull & Creighton 2012) under saddle training techniques (McGreevy and McClean 2010) and restricted access to natural grazing (McGreevy 2004). The context of this study is a Centre with predominantly novice and Therapeutic Riding (TR) riders. A multidimensional equine welfare and management programme is in place of which the McTimoney-Corley Spinal Therapy examination is one part. This paper presents the findings of a three year study tracking and recording the spinal health of 5 horses involved in TR sessions and novice private and group lessons.

Methodology

Horses were examined and adjusted (on a needs basis) a minimum two - maximum eleven times annually during 2012, 2013 and 2014. Examinations recorded discomfort levels in 8 musculoskeletal regions with spinal therapy adjustments performed post examination. Discomfort levels were marked on a scale of: 0 *no discomfort* 1 *some discomfort* and 2 *marked discomfort*. Reduced nearside and offside flexion in the cranial cervical and pelvic musculoskeletal regions was also recorded on a scale of 0 *no lack of flexion* and 1 *lack of flexion*. One control horse (unbacked) was also included. Study included videos of examinations and adjustments.

Results

Findings suggest there was a decrease in the discomfort levels in the horse's musculoskeletal regions and increase in flexion over 3 years as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. Furthermore, there was a decrease in the number of musculoskeletal regions in which there was discomfort with one horse observed as having no discomfort levels after treatment.

Conclusions

Whilst it is not clear what other interventions may have been in place over the three year timeframe, findings suggest the McTimoney-Corley Spinal Therapy may be associated with enhanced equine spinal health. Results of the control horse examination also highlight the vulnerability of horses backs in the context of the TR horse and the need for effective evidence based back care programmes.