



Scope of Practice for Equine Hydrotherapists

1. Introduction

Equine hydrotherapists provide specialised therapeutic services using water-based treatments to enhance equine health, performance, and rehabilitation. This scope of practice outlines the responsibilities, competencies, and professional standards expected of equine hydrotherapists who members of the Institute of Equine Hydrotherapists (IEH) are.

2. Professional Responsibilities

Equine hydrotherapists are responsible for:

- Assessing the suitability of hydrotherapy for individual horses.
- Developing and implementing personalised hydrotherapy programs.
- Monitoring and adjusting treatment plans based on ongoing assessments.
- Ensuring the safety and welfare of horses during hydrotherapy sessions.
- Maintaining accurate and detailed records of treatments and progress.
- Communicating effectively with horse owners, veterinarians, and neuro, musculoskeletal multidisciplinary team members.
- Adhering to ethical guidelines and professional standards set by the governing body.

3. Core Competencies

Equine hydrotherapists must demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

- **Anatomy and Physiology:** Understanding the anatomical structures and physiological functions relevant to equine hydrotherapy.
- **Hydrotherapy Techniques:** Proficient use of various hydrotherapy modalities, including but not limited to, swimming pools, water treadmills, spas, and salt-oxygen therapy.
- **Assessment Skills:** Conducting thorough assessments to determine the appropriateness of hydrotherapy for each horse.
- **Program Development:** Creating tailored hydrotherapy programs to meet the specific needs and goals of the horse.
- **Safety Procedures:** Implementing safety protocols to prevent injuries and ensure a safe environment for both horses and handlers.
- **Equipment Maintenance:** Knowledge of proper hydrotherapy equipment maintenance and operation, including water management.

4. Ethical and Professional Standards

Equine hydrotherapists must:

- Act with integrity, honesty, and professionalism.
- Prioritise the health and well-being of the horse in all treatments.
- Maintain confidentiality of client information.
- Engage in continuous professional development to stay current with advancements in equine hydrotherapy (25 hours per year).
- Collaborate with other equine health professionals to provide comprehensive care.
- Obtain informed consent from horse owners before initiating treatment.
- Obtain a veterinary referral if the horse is a rehabilitation case, not a performance case.
- Adhere to the legal and regulatory requirements governing the practice of equine hydrotherapy in the UK.

5. Education and Training

Equine hydrotherapists should have completed:

- Ongoing education to keep up to date with new techniques, research, and best practices in the field.
- Relevant equine first aid certifications as required by the professional body.

6. Scope Limitations

Equine hydrotherapists must:

- Only practice within the limits of their expertise and training.
- Refer to veterinarians or other qualified professionals when conditions fall outside their scope of practice or when additional expertise is required.
- Not diagnose medical conditions, prescribe medications, or perform procedures reserved for veterinarians.

7. Professionalism in Communications and Reporting Concerns

7.1 Communication Standards

Equine hydrotherapists must maintain high standards of professionalism in all forms of communication, including verbal, written, and electronic. This includes:

- **Clarity and Accuracy:** Ensuring all communications are clear, accurate, and professional. Information should be presented in a manner that is easily understood by clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders.
- **Confidentiality:** Respect the privacy of clients and horses by keeping all personal and health information confidential, unless required by law or with the client's explicit consent.
- **Respect and Courtesy:** Interacting with clients, colleagues, and other professionals with respect and courtesy. This includes active listening, responding to inquiries, and promptly and respectfully addressing concerns.
- **Documentation:** Maintaining detailed and accurate records of all treatments, assessments, and communications. These records should be stored securely and be readily available for review when necessary.

7.2 Reporting Concerns

Equine hydrotherapists have an ethical obligation to report concerns that may affect the health, safety, and welfare of horses or the profession's integrity. This includes:

- **Identifying Concerns:** Being vigilant in identifying any signs of abuse, neglect, or malpractice, whether by clients, colleagues, or other professionals.
- **Reporting Protocol:** Following established protocols for reporting concerns within the professional body. This typically involves documenting the concern and reporting it to a supervisor or designated authority within the organisation.
- **Whistleblower Protection:** Understanding and adhering to the professional body's policies on whistleblower protection to ensure that individuals who report concerns are not subject to retaliation.
- **Legal and Ethical Obligations:** Being aware of and complying with all legal and ethical obligations related to reporting concerns. This may include mandatory reporting requirements in cases of suspected abuse or neglect.

- Professional Integrity: Upholding the profession's integrity by reporting any unethical, illegal, or detrimental behaviour to the welfare of horses or the reputation of the equine hydrotherapy profession.

7.3 Professional Relationships

Maintaining positive and professional relationships with all stakeholders is essential for the success and credibility of equine hydrotherapists. This includes:

- Collaboration: Working collaboratively with veterinarians, trainers, and other equine health professionals to ensure comprehensive care for horses.
- Conflict Resolution: Addressing conflicts professionally and seeking to resolve disputes amicably and constructively.
- Continuing Education: Engaging in ongoing professional development to improve communication skills and stay informed about best practices in the field.

7.4 Ethical Communication Practices

Equine hydrotherapists must adhere to ethical communication practices, including:

- Honesty and Transparency: Being honest and transparent in all interactions, providing clients with complete and accurate information about the services and treatments offered.
- Informed Consent: Ensuring clients are fully informed about the potential benefits and risks of hydrotherapy treatments and obtaining their consent before proceeding.
- Professional Boundaries: Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with clients and avoiding any behaviour that could be perceived as inappropriate or unprofessional.

By adhering to these standards, equine hydrotherapists contribute to a culture of professionalism, trust, and excellence in the industry, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided to horses.

8. Conclusion

This scope of practice serves to ensure that equine hydrotherapists provide safe, effective, and ethical care to horses. Adherence to these guidelines will support the professional development of practitioners and contribute to the overall well-being of the equine population they serve.

Appendix 1:

1. Whistle-blowers Policy and Procedure

- 1.1. Whistleblowing is when an individual discloses information relating to malpractice or wrongdoing and/or the covering up of malpractice or wrongdoing. It is distinct from expressions of personal dissatisfaction which must be addressed through our complaints and appeals procedures.
- 1.2. We will act upon any disclosure received from any member of our membership, subcontractors or member of the public who feels that any malpractice or maladministration has taken place within professional body.
- 1.3. Any person who believes that IRVAP Council, one of its members or one of our subcontractors has committed an offense or has breached our procedures in the past, or is now or likely to in the future, may disclose information by contacting the Chair.
- 1.4. Where information is provided over the telephone, we will request this is provided in writing and may ask for further information to enable a thorough investigation to take place.
- 1.5. Any disclosure will be dealt with in confidence wherever possible, but we may need to disclose a whistle-blower's identity to:
 - the police, fraud prevention agencies or other law enforcement agencies (to investigate or prevent crime, including fraud);
 - the courts (in connection with court proceedings);
 - another person to whom we are required by law to make a disclosure e.g., Health and Safety Executive; the LADO (local authority safeguarding staff);
 - the Regulators responsible for regulating qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
 - or any other agencies to which we have an obligation e.g., the Charities Commission, QAA, Funding Agencies, IfA.
- 1.6. Whistle-blowers should also be aware that they may be identifiable by others due to the nature or circumstances of the disclosure.
- 1.7. Whistle-blowers will receive an update on any planned course of action. However, we have a responsibility to all concerned for confidentiality and may not be entitled to divulge the details of any ongoing investigation or its outcome. We will, however, confirm that action has been taken where required