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Introduction to Applied Equine Podiatry (AEP)

Background to AEP

Applied Equine Podiatry was founded by KC La Pierre RJF MEP. He had been a practicing farrier for 23 years and also an owner/trainer of record breaking harness racing horses. In response to his frustration at seeing deterioration in many shod horses across the USA (which he recognised were also common world wide), he started to ask the most profound but simple of questions: WHY were horses foot health deteriorating over time when shod? This led to 3 simple but profound questions:

1. Has anatomical *function* of the equine foot been defined in its entirety?
2. If so, has the *stimulus* responsible for proper function been defined?
3. If so, do current treatments of the equine foot *promote proper stimulus*?

KC found that the veterinary sciences and the farriery trade had failed to answer these simple questions. The increasingly popular barefoot movement had also failed to answer these questions and made the application of their theories impractical; their model was based on the wild horse and not the domestic horse, which lives in an entirely different environment and is therefore subject to different environmental stimulus.

KC then went on to study the equine foot and defined the *structures* in the foot; the *function* of these structures, and what *stimulus* was required for the health of these structures.

The formula which evolved from these studies is:

STRUCTURE + FUNCTION = PERFORMANCE.

The definition of AEP

The definition of AEP thus can be defined as: "The **conscientious** study of the equine foot, always striving to expose it to **proper environmental stimuli**, making **every** effort to **promote proper structure and function**, as we attempt to achieve **high performance**"

Environmental stimulus is everything in and around the horse. In other words it is all that the horse can sense, see, smell, touch, hear and taste. This also includes drugs, wormers, vaccinations, exercise, feed, turnout, stable conditions, management, trim, etc, etc.

The theory of AEP is based on the Suspension Theory of Hoof Dynamics. the Internal Arch Theory. the High Performance Trim Model and Energetics. The application of the theory of AEP is the High Performance Trim Method.

The High Performance Trim Method (or HPT method) utilises the theory and science of AEP and in practice is comprised of:

1. Conscientious evaluation of the health of the structures of the foot using the Spectrum of Useability.
2. Application of the HPT.
3. Recommendations based on the Spectrum of Useability which aim to expose the horse to proper environmental stimuli to promote proper structure and function, in order to achieve high performance (which include guidelines on infection control, management changes, exercise/conditioning).

The HPT aims to balance the internal foot by making adjustment to the external hoof, which is a vehicle of stimulus to the internal foot. In the application of the HPT method during an AEP consult, the hoof may not actually be trimmed. However, the evaluation and spectrum will provide guidelines to the owner to help them help their horse to grow a better hoof capsule and improve performance through correct environmental stimulus.

The philosophies and principles of AEP

Degreed Applied Equine Podiatrists (or DAEP's) are trained in the science, theory and practice of AEP. DAEP's are required to attend Continued Professional Development every year in order to remain on the 'active' list of DAEP's. This entitles DAEP's to become members of the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry and will use the title MIAEP after their name.

Upon completion of their studies, DAEP's sign a declaration which upholds the philosophies and principles of AEP. The most basic of these are:

1. Structure + Function = Performance
2. The horse has the innate ability to heal itself, provided that the environment is conducive to healing
3. Correct pressure is the stimulus for correct growth
4. Utilize time as a dimension in the positive treatment of the equine foot
5. DO NO HARM

(You would think that DO NO HARM would come first on the list. It is only when the previous 4 principles are understood, that DO NO HARM can be implemented.)

Spectrum of Useability

In order for AEP to be successful, the owner must accept the above principles and philosophies. The spectrum of useability, which should be provided by the DAEP at every consult, is a powerful tool which gives guidelines and responsibility to the owner. The reason for the guidelines are very simple but very important;

1. It protects the horse from harm by offering guidelines about what the horse is capable of. In other words, if the owner exceeds the horse's spectrum *as defined by the DAEP at the time of the consult*, they risk creating too much stimulus (strain) and cause discomfort and damage to structures in the foot.
2. The recommendations provide the owner with guidelines about what stimulus is required in order to improve upon the health and therefore the spectrum rating and performance of their horse.

The guidelines are there to assist the owner and for AEP to be successful, the owners must apply common sense and use advice given by their DAEP *responsibly*. Failure to use guidelines and be responsible can, at worst; cause harm and at best; result in little or no improvement in health or spectrum rating.

Holistic Equine use 3 slightly different spectrums; health, performance and development. They are related to the use of the horse, the age of the horse and expected overall health and the spectrum ratings will reflect this. For example; a horse with which the owner would like to go barefoot eventing will require at least an 8/10 on the spectrum of useability for performance. If it has fairly good structures it may score at around a 5/10 on the same spectrum. But if the owner decided to give the horse a year off in the field, the performance of the foot at that moment in time would rate higher on the spectrum for health and may score 6 or higher.

The spectrum rating can change rapidly as a result of exposure to improper environmental stimulus. For example the same barefoot eventing horse may be in work and score 8/10 but the day after the spectrum rating was completed by a DAEP, he may react to a wormer which makes him foot sore. This may affect his foot health and 4 or 5 weeks later, during his next AEP consult; the DAEP may reduce the horse's spectrum to a 4 for instance and may recommend hand walking exercise for a while and management changes aimed at protecting the horse from trauma and to help stimulate correct pressure for health. However, it is the owner's responsibility to recognise a loss of performance in their horse and recognise reactions to environmental stimulus and therefore be proactive in protecting their horse from harm by addressing improper environmental stimulus and reducing exercise accordingly. This is *responsible* use of the spectrum of useability.

Owner Commitment

Traditionally, horse owners have placed the responsibility of their horses hoof health over to their farrier. AEP is a new concept to horse owners as the idea of taking responsibility for their own horse's health and welfare is fairly unique for most.

For AEP to be successful, the owner needs to commit to the long term health and welfare of their horse and there needs to be an element of trust between the horse owner and their DAEP. In effect there needs to be a promise from both the DAEP and the owner. The DAEP promises to fulfil their contract to the Institute of AEP and the owner must also promise to accept that they are responsible for the horse's welfare including foot care *for the entire time between consults*. This is an important point as the DAEP is not responsible for the horse's welfare and nor are they responsible

for the environment in which the horse is exposed to on a day to day basis. They are therefore not in a position to make informed decisions regarding that horses health and welfare.

As already mentioned, the horses foot health is determined by proper environmental stimulus. The actual trim is a very small part of the environmental stimulus and it only sets the foot up, as far as it can *and at the time of the consult*; to help receive correct stimulus via the hoof capsule. It is the horse's exposure *over time* which allows for healing to take place *providing the horse has the innate ability to do so*.

Holistic Equine and Beccy Smith strongly advise that AEP clients read the information provided here, on our website and that provided by the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry regarding the principles and philosophies of AEP. This will give you a better understanding of AEP which will empower you as an owner and help you make better and more informed decisions about your horse's welfare and hoof health. Information from the Institute can be found at www.appliedequinepodiatry.org. If you would like to learn more about AEP in general, the Institute have on-line courses and 3 and 5 day courses which anyone can attend.

Holistic Equine appreciate that AEP is not a straight forward science and may be difficult to understand at first. We ask that you seek advice from Beccy if you have *any* questions about AEP or you have concerns about your horse's health or welfare. Likewise you can contact the Institute directly if you have queries or concerns about AEP.

For further information please visit www.holistichequine.co.uk, and www.holistichequinepodiatry.co.uk

Holistic Equine and Owner promise of commitment to AEP

As AEP requires commitment from the owner. By booking an AEP appointment with Holistic Equine and Beccy Smith, clients agree to the following;

Owners are responsible for their horse's welfare including hoof care between visits from my DAEP and will book regular AEP appointments as per my horse's spectrum guidelines. The guidelines are there to guide and must be used responsibly. Environmental stimulus, except the HPT application by my DAEP *at the time of the consult* is outside the control of the DAEP. Advice can be sought from Beccy regarding hoof care and spectrum use.

All photographs taken and paperwork completed by Holistic Equine during an AEP consult will remain the property of Holistic Equine and used by Holistic Equine for *educational and promotional purposes* and may be published for this use in whatever format Holistic Equine choose. Owner details and names of horses will not be published without prior written permission (email permission permitted) from the owner or carer.

Thank you for taking the opportunity to do an amazing service to your horse! AEP =proactive and whole horse health care and promotes holistic health, soundness and longevity for the domestic horse!

Beccy Smith BSc (Hons) EBW RM DAEP (MIAEP) of Holistic Equine.



Pictures above show a 5 year old warmblood horse with deformed hoof capsule before (left) and 4 months later using AEP (right) with Holistic Equine. Advice regarding changes to diet, management and exercise were also followed.