

# The growth of acceptance of complementary therapies in the equestrian world

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Mendy S. The growth of acceptance of complementary therapies in the equestrian world. *Curr Res Integr Med.* 2021;6(2):1.

## INTRODUCTION

This short piece precis part of a wider study into equine complementary therapists and markets' acceptance of modalities offered. It also aims to give insight into the UK equestrian complementary therapy market. Ten years of *Horse and Hound* and *Horse* magazines were studied to gauge interest through advertising and article content. Almost 200 surveys were completed by equestrians in Wales and the borders (UK), and there were a set of interviews of both equestrians and complementary therapists from the same region to gain further insights and thick description.

Many authors concur that use of complementary therapies (CAM) is growing in the West and research showed that there are over 15 million users in the UK for both people and animals. Although the research is old it proved a base for this study.

### Magazine study

*Horse and Hound* is a weekly UK magazine aimed at the professional and serious equestrian. It has been in print since the late 1800s and is well-respected with a large readership. *Horse* magazine is a sister magazine to *Horse and Hound* but published monthly and aimed at the grass roots rider. It has been in circulation since the late 1900s. Random editions of other equestrian magazines (such as *Welsh Rider*) were also investigated and the results compared with the content analysis of the main magazines researched.

Overall, there was a growth in advertising of CAM in the 10 years studied, with one particular supplier of herbal supplements advertising heavily in all editions of all magazines over the period. *Horse* magazine carried more articles on different CAM modalities than *Horse and Hound*, who focused on those closer to veterinary work (such as ultrasound and physiotherapy) rather than a range of therapies. The inference from the research was that all equestrian sectors used supplements, professional and semi-professional riders mainly adopted bodywork-based therapies, and the grass-roots riders were open to a much broader spectrum of CAM modalities.

### Survey results

Almost 200 completed surveys were returned, from a wide range of horse owners across the study region. Almost 90% of these were female, mirroring the demographics from similar studies.

### Consumer interview results

Interviewees were a sub-set of the survey respondents and the questions were designed to build upon the data already gathered. The study region is rural and consists mainly of farming communities. Therefore, the majority of the interviewees kept their horses at home rather than in livery so there was not the social space, interaction with others and opinion leadership found on livery yards. As communities are widespread this part of the research also aimed to understand where information on CAM came from and who interviewees relied upon for advice.

### CAM therapist interviews

The therapists provided a range of CAM modalities with the bodywork-based treatments (massage, chiropractic and osteopathy) proving the most popular. Therapists practising these were the busiest. Those practicing Reiki, Shiatsu and Healing were also busy but often worked on people as well as horses. Therapists practicing more esoteric therapies had to work hard to convince trial and typically were marginal businesses.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that CAM therapies were well accepted in the equestrian community in the study region. As therapies are high involvement purchases horse owners need information to reduce risk before they engage a practitioner. Opinion leaders were often used for advice as well as online research and social media platforms. Therapists need to educate potential clients (and opinion leaders) often through online platforms in order to reduce risk and encourage engagement.

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Received: July 30, 2021, Accepted: August 13, 2021, Published: August 20, 2021



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