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Perceptions of Equitation Science revealed in an online forum: Improving equine health and welfare by communicating science to equestrians and equestrians to scientists

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Abstract

One of the aims of equitation science (ES) is to improve horse welfare through a scientific approach. However, little is known about how equestrians perceive ES. To determine what equestrians think about ES, we analysed the 'everyday talk' of equestrians participating in an online forum thread debating ES. Using qualitative data analysis techniques, we inferred four beliefs about science that prevented the uptake of ES (science discounts 'feel', science is over-rated, science is a gimmick, science is reductionist), and one that supported its aims (science is useful and progressive). These beliefs are discussed with respect to the dual systems of rational and intuitive information processing present among any given population, as well as the triune dimensions of decision-making germane to horse welfare issues (ethical, moral and aesthetic). To avoid unintentionally creating resistance from those who are sceptical about science or ES, we recommend a sensitive welfare-centred research extension and communication strategy that is tailored for audiences and end-users beyond the academic production and consumption of ES.

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