

Draft rules for the veterinary para-profession of veterinary physiotherapist

1. Definitions:

“Acupressure” means the physical pressure applied to acupoints which are found along meridian pathways and which is particularly effective in the treatment of pain.

“Animal health team” means all members involved with optimising the health of the animal. It could include but is not limited to the veterinarian, veterinary nurse, farrier, dentist, trainer, saddle fitter, chiropractor, veterinary acupuncturist, behaviourist, nutritionist and veterinary Physiotherapist.

“Balance and proprioceptive training” means exercises designed to enhance and improve the patient’s ability to stand independently, and to maintain balance whilst the body is moving.

“Cardio-respiratory evaluation” means techniques employed by the veterinary physiotherapist to evaluate the cardio-respiratory system of patients within the prescribed scope of practise limited to auscultation of heart and lungs, calculation of heart rate and breathing rate and functional tests to evaluate the patient’s cardio-respiratory ability.

“Cardio-respiratory treatment” **excludes medical treatments**, includes but is not limited to the use of nebulisers, the therapy of percussions, vibrations, shaking and use of postural drainage positions.

“Cavallettis” are small jumps or poles placed at different angles and heights. The patient is required to step or trot over them. This exercise is used to improve proprioception and also to strengthen musculature involved with lifting of limbs.

“Dynamic evaluation” means the assessment of an animal patient whilst in motion, which requires active input from the patient.

“Functional diagnosis” means a diagnosis which describes the effect of the disease or injury on the ability of the animal to carry out its normal function for example decreased extension of the coxo-femoral joint vs anatomical diagnosis such as hip dysplasia.

“Goniometry” means the use of an instrument (the Goniometer) to measure the joint range of movement in flexion and extension.

“Ground work” means working with an animal on the ground using poles and cues to motivate them to perform specific exercises that will strengthen specific parts of their bodies. Ground work as opposed to ridden work is particularly used in relation to horses.

“Manual evaluation” means techniques employed by the veterinary physiotherapist, using his or her hands to evaluate soft tissue function, neurological function and joint range of movement.

“Neuro-muscular electrical stimulation [NMES]” is an electrotherapy modality that is used to artificially contract the muscles of the animal using electrical impulses to elicit a muscle contraction in innervated muscle. The electrical current is applied to the skin of the animal, using a conductive material and electrodes. It is used as a tool for assessing and treating the muscles and other associated soft tissue. It can form part of a program to activate muscles and prevent atrophy during training and rehabilitation, as well as a tool for assessing muscle function.

“Palpation” means a technique used to assess the texture and tone of an animal’s muscles and other soft tissue structures as well as particular anatomical landmarks.

“Passive evaluation” means the assessment of the neuro-muscular and musculo-skeletal state of the patient which do not require active input from the patient i.e. tests that can be applied by the practitioner without requiring the patient to actively move.

“Red flags” means warning signs that suggest that veterinary referral may be warranted. It is a term describing the ability to identify dangerous or potentially dangerous findings in the history or examination. Veterinary physiotherapists should be aware of these warning signs and know where to send the patients next. Some of the warning signs can be, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained bodyweight loss
- Loss of appetite or inappetence
- Lethargy
- Signs of illness such as vomiting and increased temperature
- Previous history of tumours
- Acute, severe pain and swelling
- Dysfunction of bladder and bowel
- Respiratory distress - tachypnoea, respiratory effort, cyanosis
- Cardiovascular distress- tachycardia, hypotension, pale mucous membrane [MM], slow or rapid capillary refill time (CRT)
- Non-weight bearing lameness
- Pain or discomfort during therapy
- Undiagnosed neurological signs
- Infected wounds
- Suspected zoonoses

“Rehabilitation exercise” means active exercises designed to achieve active pain-free range of movement, to increase muscle mass and muscle strength, improve daily function, improve balance, reduce lameness and prevent further injury.

“Resistance bands” means rubber bands of varying stiffness that increase the work of a muscle by adding resistance and thereby improving the muscle’s bulk, strength and endurance.

“Static evaluation “means the visual evaluation of the stationary animal taking into account posture, conformation, body score and any other cues that draws attention to any abnormalities.

“Stress point therapy” means tender, hyper-irritable spots found in the musculo-tendinous junction. Treatment of these stress points may include but is not limited to “hold and release” techniques and laser or light therapy.

“Trans-cutaneous electrical nerve stimulation [TENS]” is the use of electric currents produced by a device to stimulate the nerves for therapeutic purposes. TENS by definition covers the complete range of transcutaneously applied currents used for nerve excitation although the term is often used with a more restrictive intent, namely to describe the kind of pulses produced by portable stimulators used to treat pain.

“Trigger point therapy” means treatment of these trigger points that may include, but is not limited to “hold and release” techniques and laser or light therapy.

“Trigger points” means tender, hyper-irritable spots found in muscle bellies.

“Veterinary physiotherapy” means the treatment of dysfunction in the musculo-skeletal, neuro-muscular systems and cardio-respiratory system as well as the maintenance of optimal function and the prevention of dysfunction. The goal of veterinary physiotherapy is to maintain, restore and maximise optimal movement and functional ability throughout the lifespan of an animal.

2. Services pertaining specially to the profession of veterinary physiotherapist-

2.1. For the purposes of the Act the following services shall be deemed to be services, which pertain specially to the veterinary para profession of veterinary physiotherapist:

2.1.1 Treatment of conditions in animals diagnosed by a veterinarian by applying veterinary physiotherapy;

2.1.2 Veterinary physical therapy to prevent and address disease, illness, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions and physical deficiencies in animals;

2.1.3. Assist a veterinarian with the functional diagnosis of neuro musculo-skeletal conditions;

2.1.4. Work on referral by a veterinarian who has diagnosed the animal or work in consultation with a veterinarian if there is no direct referral; and

2.1.5. Work on animal species for which training was obtained but may work on other species if in consultation with an attending veterinarian and with owner consent.

3. The scope of practice of a veterinary physiotherapist includes-

- 3.1. Integration of thorough musculo-skeletal, neuro-muscular anatomical, cardiovascular and respiratory system knowledge and veterinary physiology in developing a treatment, rehabilitation and preventative plan for the patient as well as sufficient knowledge of other body systems to implement an appropriate treatment plan for other conditions which would benefit from veterinary physiotherapy modalities.
- 3.2. Integration of theory and practice to conduct a full functional evaluation of mainly companion animals with musculo-skeletal, neuro-muscular or cardio-respiratory dysfunction including, but not limited to-

Subjective evaluation

- History
- Demeanour

Health assessment

- TPR – Temperature, pulse, respiration

Static evaluation

- Conformation
- Body score
- Observation

Dynamic evaluation

- Active movement assessment
- Gait assessment
- Joint range of movement assessment
- Flexion tests as indicated
- Functional tests

Manual evaluation

- Palpation
- Manual assessment
- Muscle strength testing
- Soft tissue assessment
- Joint range of movement including goniometry and other measurements
- Use of hoof testers in animals with hooves
- Functional neurological assessment

Sport specific assessment

- 3.3. Using clinical reasoning skills to set up a treatment plan to enhance optimal function of the animal and defining short and long term goals
- 3.4. Application of appropriate treatment techniques and therapeutic modalities

Treatment techniques shall include but are not limited to:

- Massage
- Soft tissue techniques
- Neural mobilisation
- Manual therapy
- Use of thermal treatment modalities
- Rehabilitation exercise
- Cardiac rehabilitation exercises
- Electrotherapy
- Respiratory techniques – postural drainage positions, percussions, vibrations, shaking, nebulising

Soft tissue techniques shall include but are not limited to:

- Trigger point therapy
- Stress point therapy
- Acupressure
- Myo-fascial release
- Cranio-sacral therapy

Rehabilitation exercise shall include but is not limited to:

- Strength training
- Suppleness training
- Stability training
- Fitness training
- Balance and proprioceptive training
- Controlled exercise

Equipment used for rehabilitation exercise shall include but not be limited to:

- Resistance bands
- Peanut balls and other balls
- Wobble boards
- Poles work and cavallettis
- Weight training
- Stairs
- Treadmill
- Under-water treadmill
- Swimming pool
- Taping for proprioception and re-education of muscle control

Electrotherapy shall include but is not limited to:

- Neuro-muscular electrical stimulation (NMES)
- Transcutaneous nerve stimulation (TENS)
- Faradism
- Light therapy
- Class 3B and 4 laser therapy
- Therapeutic ultrasound
- Pulsed magnetic field therapy
- Static magnetic field therapy
- Emerging electrotherapy modalities

3.5. Treatment of cardio/respiratory impaired patients that have been diagnosed by a veterinarian

Evaluation and treatments shall include but are not limited to

- Exercise tolerance testing
- Non-drug nebulising (or with veterinarian prescription)
- Postural drainage
- Chest mobilisation techniques

3.6. Treatment of wounds with appropriate electrotherapy

3.7. Correct application of bandages when required to be removed for treatment purposes and the re-application thereafter.

3.8. Understanding the implementation of basic orthotics and prosthetics and advising and referring appropriately.

3.9. Client education within the defined scope of practice.

- Counselling
- Support for or dealing with bereavement

3.10. Appropriate application of knowledge of animal behaviour

- Sufficient knowledge to be safe
- Sufficient knowledge to recognise the relationship between pain and behaviour
- Sufficient knowledge to recognise normal and abnormal behaviour

3.11. Appropriate application of knowledge of nutrition to enable the veterinary physiotherapist to advise the client on weight loss and its relevance to compromised movement.

3.12. Knowledge of sport specific training and equipment and methods used to prepare the animal athletes, excluding nutrition.

3.13. Application of first aid in emergency situations.

3.14. The ability to work within a multi-disciplinary animal health care team using appropriate language and means of communication for the relevant audience.

3.15. Understanding the benefit of complementary fields to which the veterinary physiotherapist may refer.

These may include but are not limited to:

- Chiropractic
- Saddle fitting
- Dentistry
- Acupuncture
- Farriery
- Nutrition
- Behaviourist

3.16. Knowledge of health and safety within the working environment.

This shall include but is not limited to:

- Zoonoses
- Veterinary physiotherapy body mechanics and ergonomics
- Handling of the patient
- Management of the environment, including hygiene

3.17. Clear understanding of contra-indications to treatment and when to refer back to the treating veterinarian or other relevant member of the animal health care team.

3.18. Knowledge of veterinary jurisprudence and its relevance to the field of veterinary physiotherapy.

4. Course of conduct for veterinary physiotherapists

4.1 A person who practices the veterinary para-profession of veterinary physiotherapist must base his or her personal and professional conduct thereon that -

- (a) he/she is a member of a learned and honourable profession and is required to act at all times in a manner that shall maintain and promote the prestige, honour, dignity and interest of the profession and of the persons by whom it is practiced;
- (b) he/she shall keep him/herself abreast of all he or she is morally obliged to serve the public to the ethical rules and the laws which affect him/her in the practicing of his/her profession and shall, as far as it is in his/her power, assist with the application of those laws and rules;
- (f) He/she shall to the best of his or her ability by maintaining, at all times, the highest standard of animal health care and professional conduct;

- (g) he or she is to work in co-operation with colleagues and members of other professions in a responsible and professional manner; and
- (h) he or she will not permit himself or herself to be exploited in a manner, which may be detrimental to an animal, the public or the profession.

4.2 A veterinary physiotherapist must –

- (a) execute tasks discerningly and faithfully and must refuse to take part in any unethical behaviour or procedure;
- (b) keep himself or herself informed of all the laws which affect him or her in the practicing of his or her profession;
- (c) be familiar with the ethical rules applicable to veterinary therapists and must promote these rules at all times;
- (d) regard any information acquired during the course of his or her employment as strictly confidential and must refrain from divulging information to any person except his or her employer and/or the animal owner and/or as required by law;
- (e) refrain from expressing any criticism in public through which the reputation, status or practice of a colleague in the profession , veterinary profession and veterinary para-professions is or could be undermined or damaged, or through which a reflection is or could be cast on the professionalism skill, methods of conduct of such colleague; and
- (f) at all times, keep detailed and accurate records of all information and procedures performed by him or her for at least five years.

4.3 All persons practicing as veterinary physiotherapists are working for the same good cause and they must therefore co-operate with each other, the veterinary and veterinary para-professions and the authorities concerned to promote that cause.

5. Dress Code

A veterinary physiotherapist shall wear and adhere to a dress code that upholds the image of the veterinary physiotherapy profession.