Your Guide
to
Equine-Assisted Rehabilitation
for
Breast Cancer Survivors

by
Catherine Hand,
Advanced Instructor PATH Intl.

www.dreamriderequestriantherapy.com

©2012 Catherine Hand, Alpine, California

Catherineh@prodigy.net

619-445-2576
Purpose

The purpose of my presentation and accompanying handbook is to describe the principles and methods of Equine-assisted Rehabilitation for recovering breast cancer patients so that instructors and breast cancer survivors will realize the benefits of this gentle and effective therapy and strive to make it available to women with breast cancer.

Preface

The Healing Power of Horses

After fifteen years providing equine-assisted instruction to physically and mentally disadvantaged children, I learned that I could apply the same techniques to my own recovery after breast cancer. I felt myself for the first time, how combined horse/human bodywork could actually heal.

I also learned that it was not necessary to ride the horse to receive strength from the horse. I learned that grooming is much more than grooming; it enables the re-sensitization of the person after the numbing effects of breast cancer treatment. I learned that horses not only smell fear, they smell chemotherapy, and through the generosity of their spirit, they can walk us through fire and lead us back to health.

I have found music and visualization to be essential in my work with breast cancer patients. Clients choose the sound track and the script for their individual recovery. My own recovery from terminal breast cancer incorporated bodywork, rhythmic breathing and synchronized movement to music, the principles I will present here at this conference. My six-year survival is a testimony to the efficacy of these principles.
Introduction

“Looks Don’t Matter”
‘It’s what’s inside that counts.”

Confessions of a Breast Cancer Survivor

A Mission Statement for Equine-Assisted Therapy for Breast Cancer Survivors

It is my mission to provide equine therapy for breast cancer survivors and to inspire others with the means to do the same. Catherine Hand, 2013

It seems we know all that we are going to know from the beginning, but only discover what we knew when something traumatic happens to wake that up in us. Isolated and on hospice after breast cancer treatment, I gave up my riding program and to keep my post chemo brain mind active, I engaged in constant reading and searching for ideas in horse training videos on how to address my disabled condition after treatment. While trying to visualize what I could no longer do, I saw a lesson on overcoming fear on the Parelli Savvy Club DVD, issue #7. I’ve found that if I could not see it in my mind, I could not do it. It was like that with art. For thirty years, I made my living as a stage designer where what I could visualize, I could create.

Some say it does not matter how you look, but knowing how things look has been my strength as an artist. When I was designing costumes or teaching students in University how to be costume designers, the first thing I taught them was that their job was to create a look—a way of moving with body molding undergarments to create a silhouette or a posture so that when that character walked onto a stage, everyone in the audience knew what he would say or do before he ever opened his mouth. The look, the physiognomy, the cut of the clothes, the conformation and finally, the way of moving all tell us what to expect and how to relate to both people and horses. Denying this is like wearing blinders.

Then comes "training." How does the teacher, “trainer” modify, transform, improve, enable the potential, which is counter to the observed realities of what presents in the look
or way of going of either the person or the horse? To try to bring about a desired result, one has to work with what is there—that means reading "the look"—having the power of observation.

So, if a woman comes to me after mastectomy, losing her hair, her confidence, perhaps the love in her life, or her sense of a future, will I tell her, “It doesn't matter how you look?” Like the horse, she will take me for a fool. No, I think it is necessary to acknowledge the reality of the loss and the extreme disadvantage that woman has been cast into by what has been done to her. Then comes the notion of becoming the star of her own movie through imagination, myth, visualization—step by step, with eyes closed, feeling her way blindly until the touch, the feel makes its way back into the mind and suddenly she sits up straight, head high, missing chest out and breaths the air deeply again after months of holding her breath waiting to die or wishing to die.

If a horse hears what I cannot hear or sees what I cannot see and it trembles in fear, do I act as if what it fears isn't real and try to force that horse to ignore what it fears, or do I stop, look in the direction of the source of that horse's fear and say, “yes, it is real, I too see it, but I do not fear it. Let’s try to get beyond that and chose another direction.” Hopefully, that horse will allow me to lead it knowing that I am not deaf, blind or dumb. Hopefully, that mutilated, shamed, despairing woman will allow me, another mutilated, shamed, but not despairing woman to lead her out of despair and fear. Yes, it is real, it is a horror, it is the Heart of Darkness, but once we have been forced to go there, we must not become prey animals ready to flee or fight, we must become human again, woman again, powerful again. It is my ambition to do equine therapy for breast cancer survivors and inspire others with the means to do the same. This requires first confronting reality and next confronting fear.
Post-Traumatic Stress in Breast Cancer Patients

“PTSD applies to any life-threatening trauma and breast cancer is certainly that.” Dr. Paul A. Spiers, PhD Forensic Neuropsychologist; Assistant Professor, Psychiatry, Boston University School of Medicine; Visiting Scientist, Clinical Research, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Co-Chair, Legislative and Legal Advocacy Committee, Compassion & Choices, and Past-President, Board of Directors, End-of-Life Choices (was Hemlock Society)

Post-traumatic stress is often an after effect of the trauma of breast cancer and its treatment. The ways of dealing with PTSD in clinical therapy or equine facilitated therapy can similarly be very useful in rehabilitating the often-devastated lives of breast cancer survivors

Horses are being used to treat the symptoms of PTSD for wounded warriors. Fear and anxiety as well as feeling alienated from the civilian world are characteristic of this type of PTSD. The main symptoms of “battle fatigue” PTSD applicable to women are the feelings of alienation and the need to feel whole again.

Alienation from the norm of society with its emphasis on breasts as a necessary female attribute and the alienation felt when breasts are removed is a component of PTSD. Associated embarrassment after the body is altered along with damage from the treatment of chemotherapy and radiation, both of which alter the brain as well as the body, contribute to the state of mental imbalance, which can be manifested in tactile defensiveness, sexual dysfunction and hyper vigilance.

The acceptance of the horse, regardless of the condition of our bodies is key to beginning the process of self-acceptance in our new normal. This acceptance is not only comforting, but also energizing. It provides a kind of release of tension for the client that is both relaxing and healing. The horse is also relaxed by the kind of trust rather than domination that this kind of synchronized exercise requires.
The Handbook

Your Guide to Equine-Assisted Rehabilitation for Breast Cancer Patients

Following are a few pages to indicate the contents of the handbook. It is a step-by-step “how to do it,” forty-page, illustrated booklet.

The following pages are provided here as a small sample of how the handbook is organized. Enclosed in this packet is an order form, which can be either given to me, Catherine Hand at this conference with a check for $20.00 or mailed to me. A handbook purchased here, is $15.00 while supply lasts. The price to order by mail is $20.00, which includes the shipping. The handbook is spiral bound, durable and easy to use outdoors during therapy sessions. See enclosed order form with my email and mailing address at the back of these pages. Orders will be taken for this first edition only until Dec.30, 2014.
Equine-Assisted Rehabilitation for Breast Cancer Patients Outline

Contents

Part I—Getting Started
   A. Assumptions: Client, Horse, and Environment
   B. Preparation: Client, Horse, Volunteers and Environment

Part II—The Four Principles:
   1. Re-sensitize the person
   2. Activate the Vagus Nerve
   3. Synchronize breathing with the horse
   4. Synchronize movement with the horse.

Part III—Methods

Part IV—Timing and Sequencing

Part V—Bonding

Part VI—Precautions and References
Part I

Getting Started: The Client

- The breast cancer patient needs physical and emotional revitalization
- Her vital functions have been impaired.
- Her self-image has been impacted by surgery and treatment.
- She is tactilely defensive.
- She needs to physically reconnect to her body and to others.
- She is seeking an alternative therapy.
- She is weakened, and may have trouble breathing and supporting her own weight.
- She does not need to know how to ride a horse.

Getting Started: The Horse

- The horse is no taller than 14 hands.
- The horse has beauty, is comfortable, round and can carry 150lbs.
The horse is not in pain and has been trained to stand square on command, and breath in time with the equine specialist at the mounting block or ramp.

The horse is not easily distracted, leads well, and moves rhythmically to music

**Getting Started: Equipment Needed**

- Padded Vaulting Barrel with handles to practice positions before mounting the horse.

- Three-step, 3’ high platform, or ramp for ease of mounting.

- Thick vaulting pad and surcingle.

- Round pen or small arena preferably level.

- Sunscreen and insect repellant for people and horse.

- Boom box with working CD player - battery operated or power outlet.

- Barrel or stand for boom box

- Bottled water for all (hydration essential).

- Oximeter to measure oxygen and heart rate.
Part I Preparation

The Client

Introducing the client to the positions (forward, side, backward, prone) on a padded vaulting barrel should be done to assess her condition before she mounts a horse. Her range of motion in both arms and legs may be constricted. Clients may have weak legs or stiff hip joints. To prevent cramping upon mounting, barrel height should be 56” or less. Steps to the barrel should be at least 18” high. Only after determining her ability to mount at the height of the horse and dismount to the ground, to lift one or both her legs over the crest and the hindquarters, should the exercises on the horse begin.

The Horse

1. Trained to stand square at mounting block
2. Trained to accept all body positions by practice with able-bodied volunteers.

The Environment

1. Free of spectators, noise or distractions
2. Quiet enough to concentrate on music.
3. Adults only except for trained volunteers.
4. Separate from/ out of view of other riding activities.
5. Ideally under shade of cover if possible for first sessions.

(Medications can cause UV hypersensitivity).

Preparation: Volunteers

1. Experience the positions themselves on the barrel
2. Practice dismount assist from the barrel
3. Practice positions and dismount assist on the horse.
Volunteers Practice Positions on Barrel

Volunteers practice dismount

Preparation: The Client

1. The client (whose range of motion in both arms and legs is constricted) should be introduced to the positions first on vaulting barrel to loosen joints.

2. Clients may have weak legs or stiff hip joints. To prevent cramping upon mounting, barrel height should be 56” or less. Steps to the barrel should be at least 18” high.

3. The client should be comfortable with the horse’s body through grooming before mounting.

4. The client should provide her own music and observe the horse working to the music before synchronized movement on the horse begins.
Order Form

“Your Guide to Equine-Assisted Rehabilitation for Breast Cancer Patients”

A practical handbook, which details the therapeutic needs of the breast cancer patient and explains the principles, methods, and training techniques for therapists, instructors, volunteers and equine specialists preparing to provide equine-assisted rehabilitation for breast cancer patients. Booklet contains instructions, illustrations and references.

To:

Catherine Hand
543 Anderson Rd.
Alpine, CA 91901-1504

From: _________________________________________ (Please print)
Address ____________________________________________________________________________
City ______________________________State _______________Zip Code________________
Country___________________________________

Email: ________________________________Phone________________________________________

I would like to order:

________ Single copy of “Your Guide to Equine-assisted Rehabilitation for Breast Cancer Patients”

________ Copies of “Your Guide to Equine-assisted Rehabilitation for Breast Cancer Patients”

Cost for each copy - $15.00
Shipping & handling each copy - $5.00
Total for each copy - $20.00

Total enclosed $______________