

Impact of Mentorship on Veterinary Interventions to Improve Working Equid Health

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Introduction The majority of working equids receive little to no veterinary care. To address this need, equine veterinarians seek to volunteer to improve working equid health. However, new programs are fraught with logistical challenges and may lack sustainability. These risks are amplified by inexperience and a lack of understanding of effective development principles. Multiple advantages to new veterinary assistance programs for working equids can be realized through mentorship by established equine welfare organizations.



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Methods Two equine welfare organizations, The Donkey Sanctuary Mexico (DS) and World Horse Welfare (WHW) volunteered to provide training, staff, and logistical support to American equine veterinarians who wanted to deliver effective health care services to working equids.

- Mentorship included initial training through an annual workshop, and continued through the establishment of new country programs in Latin America over a 5 year period.
- Emerging American leaders from these programs formed the nonprofit organization, Equitarian Initiative (EI), to support further training and project growth.
- Both DS and WHW continued to mentor new project leaders. The number, growth, and outcomes of these programs were measured.



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Results

1) 5 Equitarian Training Workshops: In 2010, the initial 6 day workshop was hosted by DS.

- Veterinarians and veterinary students learned via participatory classroom discussions and working equid mobile health clinics in multiple communities in a preexisting DS program for final year Mexican veterinary students.
- U.S. equine veterinarians with international development experience partnered with faculty from the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico to lead themed workstations at the community work sites.
- World Horse Welfare provided instructors in farriery and saddlery
- Subsequent annual Equitarian Workshops were held in Mexico through 2013, and trained veterinary participants from 7 countries as well as animal science professionals.
- Content increasingly emphasized development principles for sustainable impact.
- In 2014, the Equitarian Workshop was held in Nicaragua and organized by Equitarian Initiative. WHW and DS and 4 other nonprofit organizations participated, prompting productive discussions of mutual challenges and best practices. Nicaraguan veterinary students and faculty were included.
- Over 2,000 working equids received health care, and more than 75 veterinarians were trained at the 5 workshops.



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2) Five New Country Programs: After one workshop, pilot projects were begun in Costa Rica and Mexico that experienced slow growth. In contrast, WHW invited Workshop trainees to lead teams in Honduras and Guatemala, building on their infrastructure, farriery, saddlery and community education expertise. These have grown significantly, leading to tripartite partnerships with national veterinary colleges. A 5th project in Haiti begun by a Workshop veterinarian works with WHW saddlers. In 2014, the Costa Rica project added veterinary services in a new WHW program. Workshop experiences also enhanced 4 preexisting projects.

3) Career Impact: Individuals that participated in the workshops and country programs have chosen to dedicate more time to equine community service, including seeking graduate training and jobs in development and public health, and opportunities to participate in additional programs.



Discussion Rapid growth of EI projects has been achieved through mentorship from DS and WHW, as volunteer veterinarians have limited time and access to in-country infrastructure. Continued mentorship and welfare team participation in EI projects enhance educational and service outcomes. Grafting veterinary teams onto existing DS or WHW welfare programs augments health education of owners, veterinarians and depth of veterinary services.

Conclusion Mentorship of veterinary teams by welfare organizations accelerates growth, and improves the quality and sustainability of their impact.

