

# Researchers examind equine-assisted learning

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Researchers in the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture recently completed one of the first studies to explore how working with horses can develop emotional intelligence in humans. UK Center for Leadership Development researchers, Patricia Dyk and Lissa Pohl, collaborated with UK HealthCare nurse researchers, Carol Noriega, Janine Lindgreen and Robyn Cheung on the two-year study, titled "The Effectiveness of Equine Guided Leadership Education to Develop Emotional Intelligence in Expert Nurses."

"With Lexington being known as the Horse Capital of the World, it is only fitting that the University of Kentucky is conducting pioneering research in the emerging field of equine assisted learning," said Patricia Dyk, director of the Center for Leadership Development.

The project included a control group of 10 [nurses](#) from the Neuroscience Surgery Service Line and an [intervention group](#) consisting of 11 nurses from the Trauma and Acute Care Surgical Service Line at UK Chandler Hospital. At the start of the study and again six months later, both groups took the online assessment appraising emotional intelligence. Nurses in the intervention group participated in a one-day workshop that involved experiential learning with horses.

"Each exercise in the workshop was designed to develop the four [emotional intelligence](#) competency areas of self-awareness, self-management, [social awareness](#) and relationship management," said Lissa Pohl, research project manager and workshop facilitator.

Nurses from the intervention group filled out qualitative surveys immediately after their experience with the horses and again three months after the workshop.

The before and after survey results showed there was an increase in the scores of the intervention group in all four competency areas when compared to the [control group](#). The researchers admitted, though, that the small number of participants in the study makes it difficult to conclude that working with the horses was the cause of the intervention group's increase.

Marie-Claude Stockl was the co-facilitator for the workshop with the nurses. She owns the Horse Institute, and as such, facilitates equine-assisted learning workshops for corporate groups in central New York state.

"We are thrilled to get this research completed, because it builds the credibility of all organizations offering this type of learning experience," she said.

According to Pohl, the initial results are encouraging and they lay the groundwork for subsequent studies of larger and more diverse populations of nurses.

"If horses can increase our ability to understand ourselves and others better, then the healthcare industry is a perfect place for studies like these," she said. "When nurses and doctors benefit from collaborating with horses then ultimately their patients also benefit."

**More information:** [www.ca.uky.edu/cfld/research.php](http://www.ca.uky.edu/cfld/research.php)

Provided by University of Kentucky

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