

66<sup>th</sup>  
**EAAP**  
ANNUAL MEETING



# Horse Owners' Experiences and Decision Making Regarding Equine Emergencies

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Introduction

Methods

Results

Discussion

Many horse owners will encounter an equine emergency

Colic, laminitis and leg fractures are the most common equine emergencies (Henderson, 2013)

Decision making



Treat?

Euthanize?



How are decisions reached?

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Horse: human  
relationship<sup>3</sup>

Finances /  
resources

Horse age, use,  
personality, value

Veterinary  
advice<sup>1, 2</sup>

Severity of  
condition /  
prognosis

Quality of life  
assessment

**Predicted  
decision  
influencers**

Insurance

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## Aim

- To explore horse owners' experiences during equine emergencies:-
  - To understand how owners decide whether to treat or euthanize
  - To examine owners' satisfaction with treatment

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Mixed method approach

Online  
questionnaire

Focus group

Interview

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Online  
questionnaire



Horse owners (n=362) who had experienced equine emergency

Condition? Previous episodes?  
Previous use of horse? Insurance?

At onset – treat or euthanize?

What influenced decision to treat / euthanize?

How satisfied were  
owners with treatment?

What facilities were  
available during rehab?

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Horse owners (n=5) who had NOT experienced equine emergency

Do you think you would treat a horse with severe laminitis / colic etc?

What would your reasons be for not treating?

What would your reasons be for treating?

Do you have a limit on what you would spend on treatment?

Do you believe long term treatment impacts on horse welfare?

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Equine rehabilitation professional in the US

Does gender affect decision to treat / euthanize?

How much do you consider the horse's current use?

Do you feel your vet understands your decision making?

Have you perceived differences between the US and UK regarding opinions on treatments / euthanasia?





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Data analysis

Closed questions: Chi squared test of association

Eg: “Is there an association between the emergency condition and whether owners chose to euthanize or treat?”

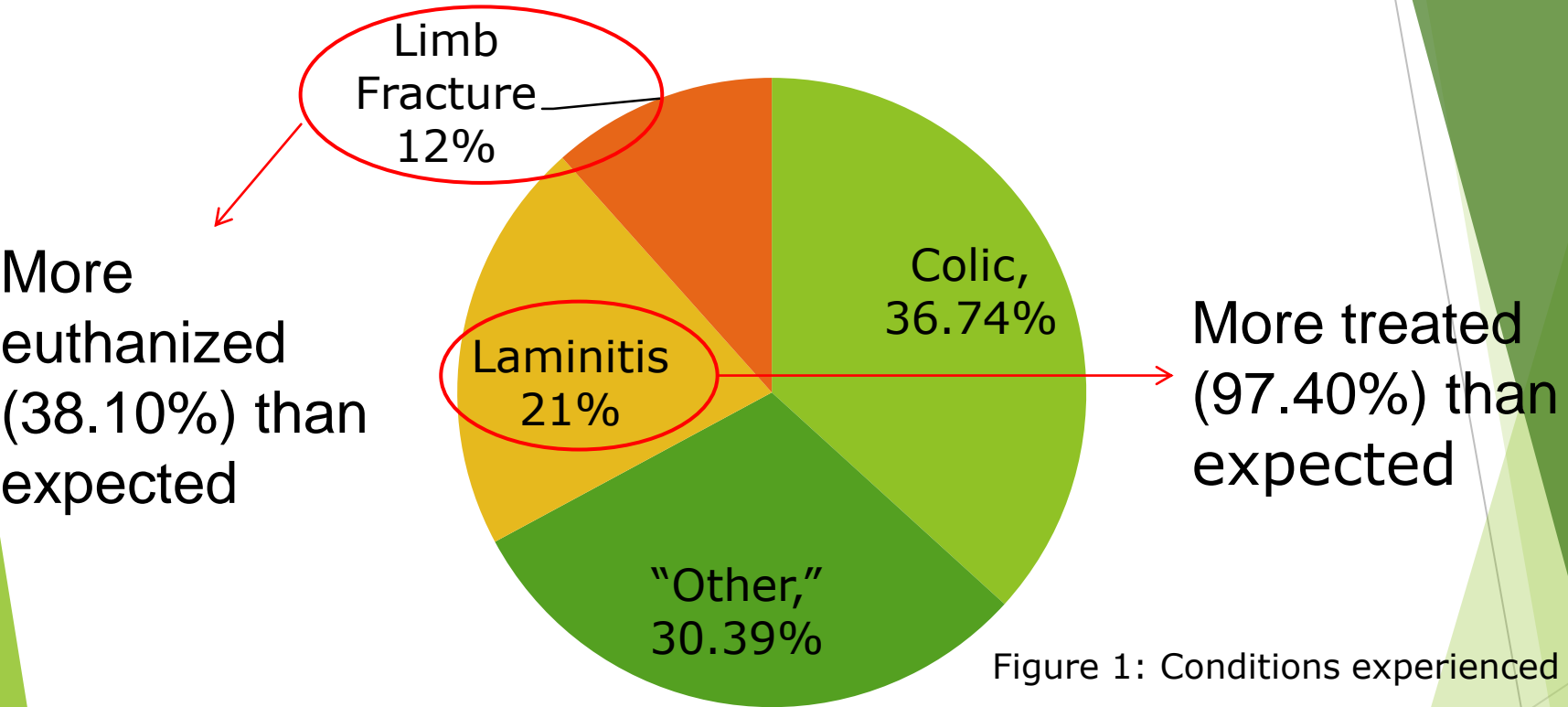
Qualitative responses: *basic* content analysis

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Most owners chose to treat initially (86.15%)

Condition was significantly associated with the initial decision to treat or euthanize ( $P < 0.001$ )



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Insurance made it more likely for the horse to be initially treated ( $P < 0.01$ )

Entire males were more likely to be euthanized than expected ( $P < 0.05$ ), but were poorly represented in the sample size.

Where featured, entires generally experienced “other conditions”

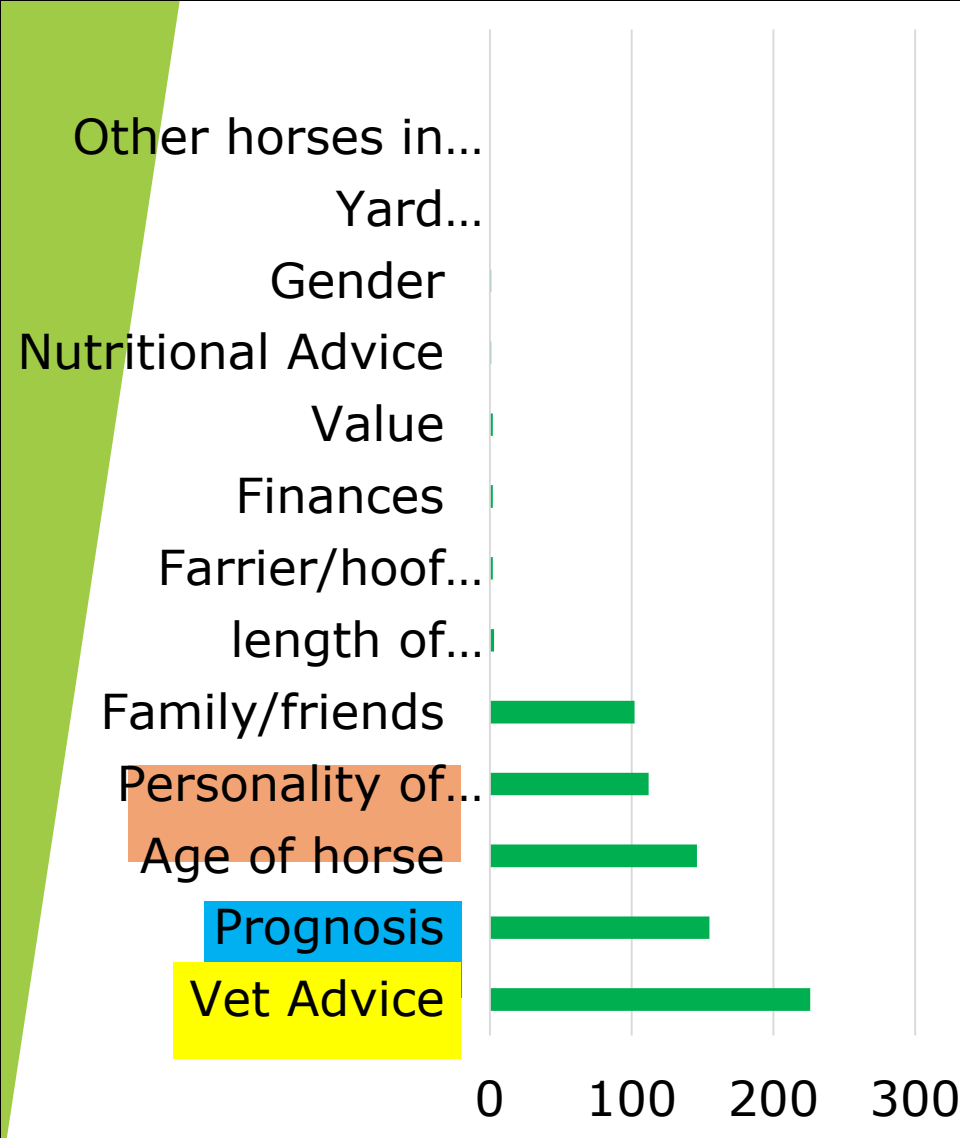


Figure 2. Influences to euthanize

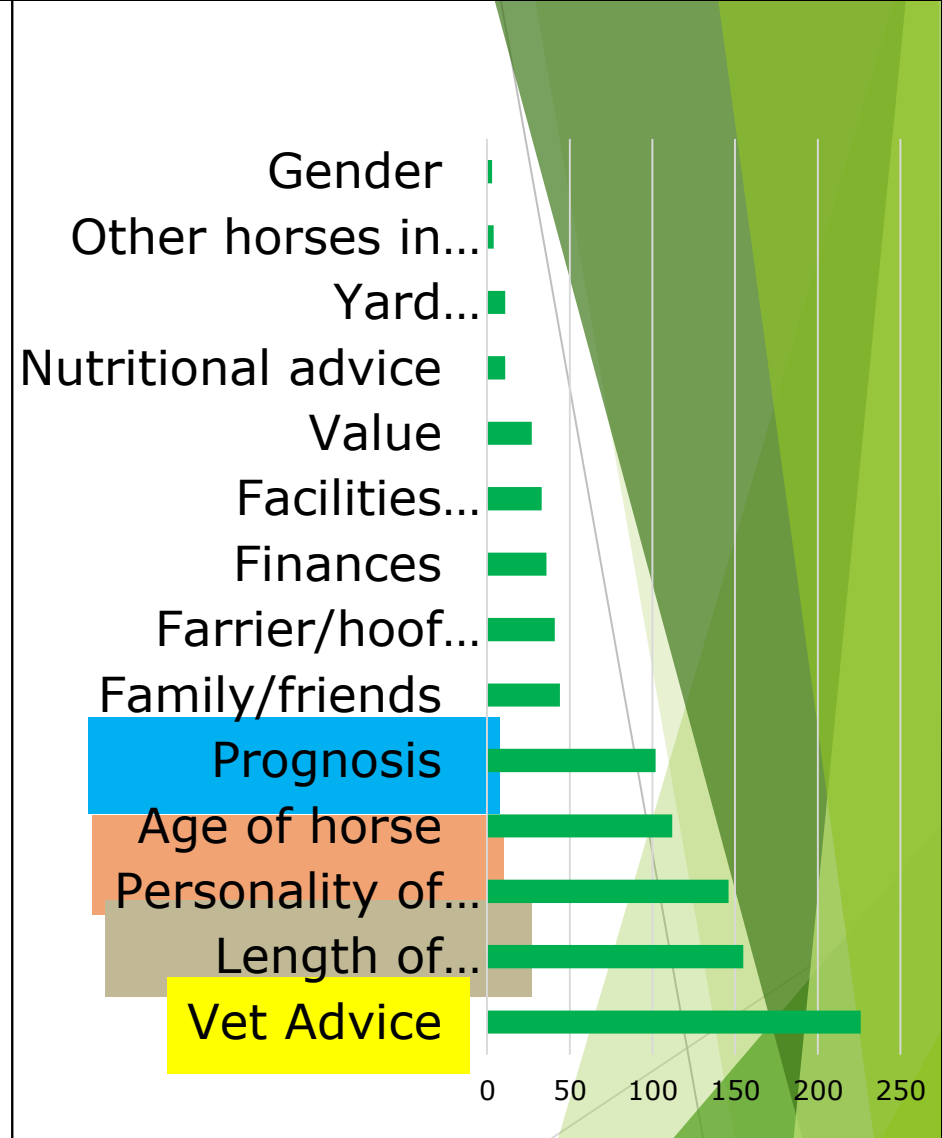


Figure 3. Influences to treat

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Approximately 2/3 of horses treated recovered to the owner's satisfaction



Figure 4: Reasons owners were satisfied with recovery

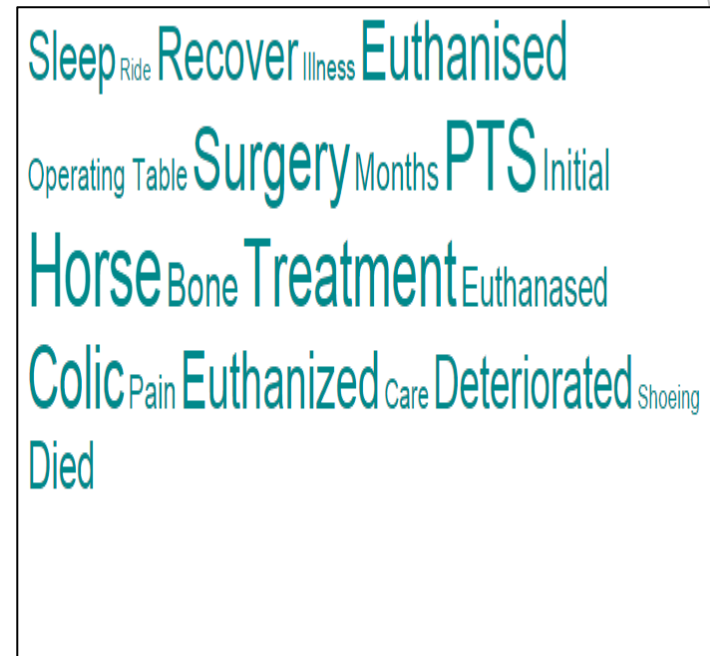


Figure 5: Reasons owners were not satisfied with recovery

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Focus group:

Condition	Would treat	Would not treat
Surgical colic	4	1
Severe laminitis	3	2
Limb fracture	2	3

**Reasons for treating:-**

Prognosis  
Future of horse  
Vet / yard owner advice  
Age of horse

**Reasons for not treating:-**

Money  
Prognosis  
Time and family  
Other horses



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- Owners seem keen to attempt treatment where possible
- Veterinary advice is highly important for both decisions, highlighting this essential role
- Horse owners need support in reaching decisions during emotionally charged situations<sup>1,2,3</sup>



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- Horse: human relationship has an apparent influence on decision making
- Horse personality and length of ownership can be influential
- Horse gender effects are not fully understood
- The nature of the emergency is significant, possibly related to pre-conceived ideas of the likely success of treatment (as seen in focus group)





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## Applications to industry:-

- Help aid research into decision making
- Understanding that there are many different reasons owners choose to euthanize or treat
- Develop veterinarian education

# Continuing Work

- ▶ **Equine Passports And Euthanizing The Horse: Have We Produced A Welfare Crisis?**

- ▶ Susan Schofield and Charlotte Brigden



- ▶ **Equine End of Life Collaborative Project**

- ▶ Provide in-depth awareness of attitudes towards equine euthanasia and end of life decisions.

- ▶ Yield ways in which equine owners can be helped to prepare to make the decision to have an equine euthanised as well as informing other end of life decisions and how owners can be best supported at such times.



# Any Questions?



Founder is very SERIOUS.