**Discussing complementary and alternative veterinary medicine: equine veterinarians’ perceptions**

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**Background:** Based on our earlier study\(^1\) up to 75% of horse owners indicate that they have used complementary or alternative veterinary medicine (CAVM), e.g. osteopathy or acupuncture. However, non-disclosure of CAVM use to the veterinarian is common. This may harm animal welfare as not all CAVM treatments are evidence-based. The aim of this study was to investigate how veterinarians communicate about CAVM with clients and identify factors influencing CAVM discussions.

**Methods:** Telephone survey among Flemish equine veterinarians conducted by a single researcher in February-June 2022. Veterinarians’ contact details were retrieved from a public list, resulting in 338 contacted vets and 101 completed surveys. The survey included 13 questions, mainly multiple choice and Likert scale type. Answers were recorded in Qualtrics\(^\circledR\) and statistical analysis was performed using SPSS\(^\circledR\).

**Findings:** The majority of veterinarians indicated that they discuss CAVM with clients on a weekly (39.6%) or daily (21.8%) basis. Participants indicated that initiation of this conversation happened most often by the client (49.3%) or was evenly distributed between veterinarian and client (26.8%). When vets initiate the conversation, CAVM is either mentioned as one of many treatment options or as complementary therapy in addition to traditional treatment. Whether CAVM is mentioned depends largely on the problem diagnosed and if CAVM seems to be applicable. Other factors hindering communication are no knowledge about and no support of CAVM by the vet, clients already having a CAVM practitioner or clients who don’t ask about CAVM.

**Discussion:** Conversation about CAVM could be facilitated by having informed vets, actively approaching clients instead of waiting for them to ask questions. Veterinarians’ knowledge and communication skills could be improved with educational courses.

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