

# Hipotherapy as the therapeutic treatment for children

## on the example of the 'Fundacja Całego Życia' activities

Bartosz Michno<sup>1</sup>; Gabriela Poczatek<sup>2</sup>; Aleksandra Żelazna<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> Jagiellonian University, <sup>2</sup> Pedagogical University of Cracow



### INTRODUCTION

Hipotherapy is an action to restore health and fitness with the help of a horse or horse riding. It provides many therapeutic options, therefore it is one of the methods with the largest range in terms of the diversity of patients using it. The goal of hipotherapy is considered to be restoring physical and mental fitness to the extent possible. hipotherapy is one of the elements of therapeutic rehabilitation and as such is carried out by a specialist on behalf of a doctor.

The "Full Life" Foundation, formerly the "hipotherapy - For the Rehabilitation of Disabled Children" Foundation has been continuously popularizing hipotherapy as an extremely effective and comprehensive therapy method in Poland since 1989 (with a unique psycho-motor and social impact). The poster will cover theoretical issues related to the functioning of hipotherapy conducted by the foundation and the results of observations made in the facility will be discussed.

### POPULATION

Hipotherapy classes are attended by children aged 3 to 15. Classes are conducted in a hall in Krakow - inside the building or in the case of nice weather in the surrounding area. One session lasts 30 minutes. The vast majority of children using hipotherapy suffer from neurodevelopmental and psychological syndromes, however, this structure has changed over the years because previously dominated patients with neurological and genetic syndromes. Admission of a child to hipotherapy classes must be preceded by a visit to the doctor who makes the diagnosis necessary to determine the work plan. Often, consultation with other specialists is also necessary to properly describe and specify the degree of disability or illness. During hipotherapy, two Hutsul horses are used - "Gąg" characterized by a slow gait, adapted rather to younger pupils and "Pela", which is more energetic and has a larger step. Both stallions and Hutsul mares are marked by a strong and firm constitution, lively temperament, gentle disposition. Movement at the walk and trot should be characterized by high dynamics, moderate sliding, correct cadence. Shortening of gait due to anatomical structure and conditions of use is not considered a defect.

### RESULTS

When constructing a therapy plan and conducting classes, the hipotherapist is guided by the following principles:

Individualisation - a separate work program is selected for each patient, because due to the diversity of disorders, it is not possible to stick to any pattern. It also takes into account personality differences - some children are more shy and fearful, others too brave, some may need more encouragement and praise. The rate at which patients make progress varies. Some children require a lot of repetition and learning is a lengthy and more demanding process, while others learn much faster. hipotherapists also use a variety of aids to make their activities more attractive. hipotherapists also use alternative and supportive methods of communication (e.g. Makaton) for those who do not have speech skills or possess it to the extent that satisfactory communication is impossible.

Arousing positive motivation - hipotherapy is also a great opportunity to increase motivation to live and fight your own illness or disability. For many children with disabilities this motivation may be disturbed: they do not want to exercise, they are discouraged and bored with the monotony of classes. The most effective way to overcome this reluctance in a child is to show him an attractive and not too distant goal, the implementation of which is interesting and pleasant. The most important thing during the process is not to let the patient get bored or discouraged by the monotony of classes, excessive demands or unpleasant atmosphere.

Security - this is a particularly important matter. You must be able to anticipate and consistently follow the rules of working with horses. The safety requirements in hipotherapy must be particularly high - not only the selection of a horse, equipment, place to work, but also the ground, baying or outfit is important. The condition of safe hipotherapy is accurate medical diagnosis of the child's illness and cooperation with the hipotherapist's assistant, who provides comfort for the rehabilitation of both the hipotherapist and the child.

Long-term effects - the hipotherapeutic process must last for a long time to have the right effect, so that all newly learned activities and behaviors are properly recorded. The child attends classes from early childhood until the time the horses become unfit for him.

### METHOD

Collected information was obtained through:  
- Observations regarding the preparation of horses for the hipotherapy process,  
- Conversations with hipotherapists and the President of the Foundation Board,  
- Analysis of therapy plans,  
- Learning about the materials used during classes with children,  
- Analysis of the characteristics of horses prepared for hipotherapy.

Chart 1. Disease patients participating in hipotherapy.

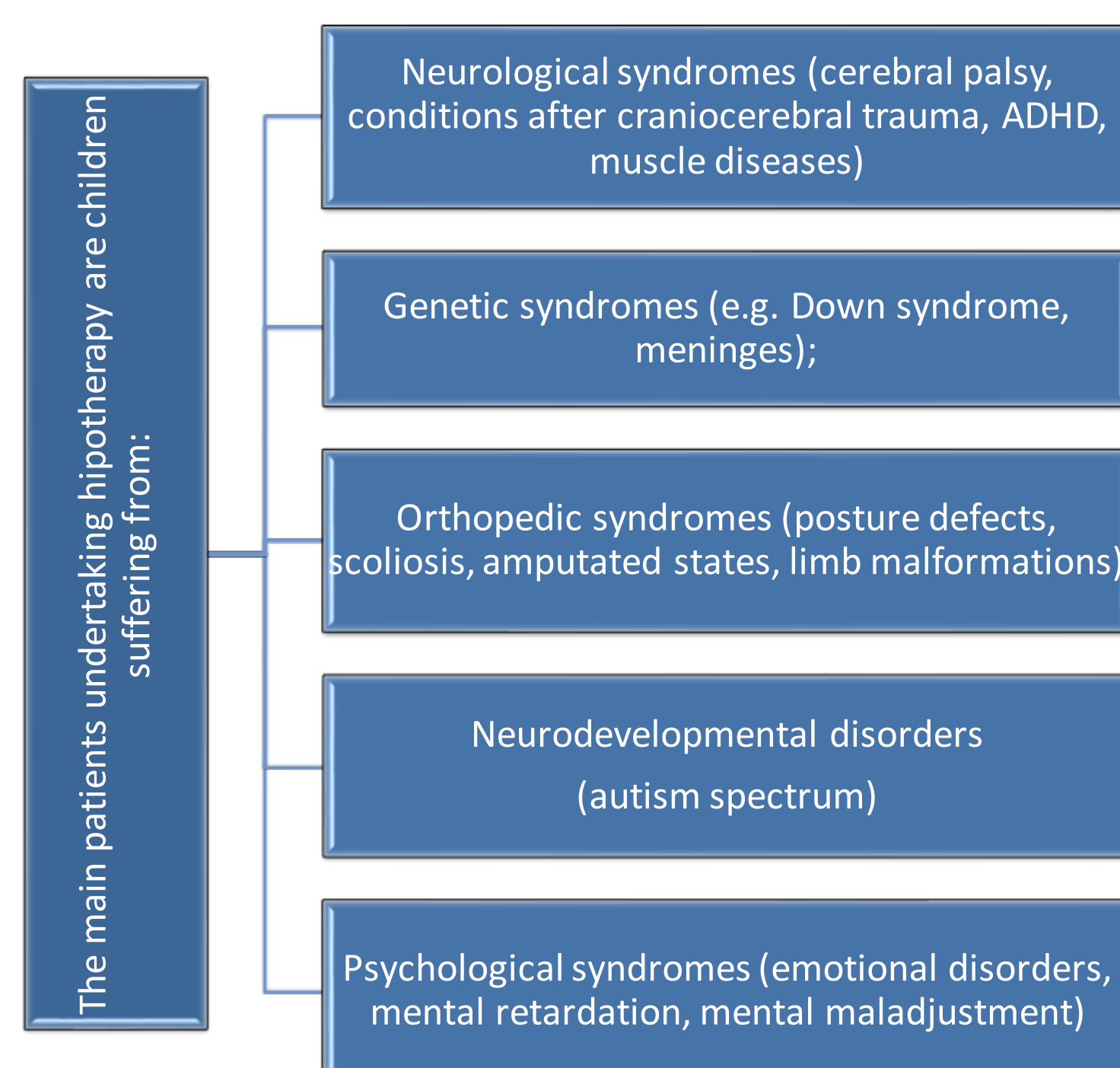
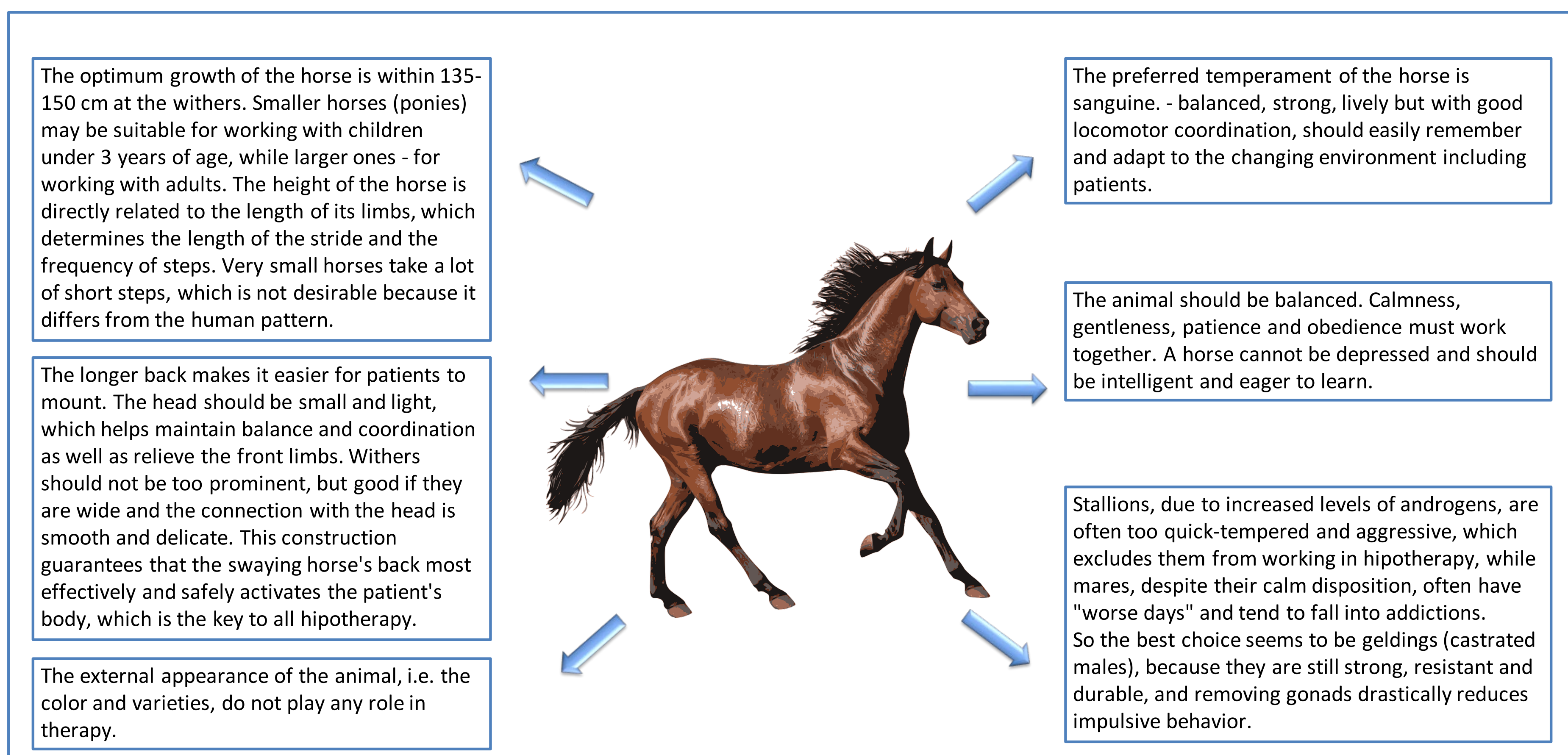


Chart 2. Features of a horse used in hipotherapy



### DISCUSSION

hipotherapy is one of the forms of multi-profile therapy for children and adolescents with developmental dysfunctions. The activities of the 'Full Life' Foundation are a comprehensive set of experiences regarding this type of impact. It would be particularly valuable to conduct quantitative and qualitative research with the participation of pupils attending classes.

### Contact

Gabriela Poczatek  
gabriela.poczatek@student.up.krakow.pl

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