The Benefits of Hippotherapy

Doctor of otolaryngology at Portland Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialists, Dr. Suzanne Cleland-Zamudio founded and runs the Sycamore Lane Therapeutic Riding Center. Dedicated to promoting the use of therapeutic riding, Dr. Suzanne Cleland-Zamudio provides several services through her riding center, including [hippotherapy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippotherapy).

Hippotherapy, a physical, occupational, and speech therapy, incorporates the movement of horses to increase functional behaviors within people suffering from developmental, physical, and mental disabilities. Beneficial to both adults and children, hippotherapy has helped treat conditions such as cerebral palsy, behavioral disorders, psychiatric disorders, and autism.

Hippotherapy provides a wide variety of benefits. Through the contact with another living creature, patients in hippotherapy programs are able to experience the feel, smell, and sounds of a horse and associate positive feelings from those sensory stimulations. Riding a horse also requires balance and learning to move with the horse, which teaches patients the necessary muscle control needed to balance during other daily activities.

Hippotherapy is also used to support speech therapy by utilizing the horse’s movement to facilitate physiological systems that are used in the production of speech and language. While riding a horse, many patients are more receptive to learning words that relate to horses and other animals. Riding also provides the opportunity for repetition exercises, which improve comprehension skills. Hippotherapy further improves patients’ self-esteem and confidence as they overcome the challenge of riding a horse.