Clown Doctoring and the Role of Positive Psychology in Geriatric Care

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Photos courtesy of Bernie Warren, PhD and Fools For Health, www.foolsforhealth.ca
Clowns work in Hospitals and Healthcare across the life span

Clowns have moved outside the pediatric unit and even beyond the hospital into other healthcare settings.

With many benefits to patients, families and staff and the community.
Clown-doctors

- Parody the work and medical procedures of doctors, nurses and the health care team

- wear a red nose, a white lab coat, but little or no traditional clown make-up.

- are called DR. e.g. Dr. Haven’t-a-Clue, Dr. Cha-Cha, Dr Fuzz E Wuzzy

- are often identified by a distinctive trademark [e.g. yellow taffeta tutu (Dr. Twinkle-Toes), Giraffe ears (Dr. Giraffe)] connected to their name

- work in pairs (often dubbed a “clown marriage”), providing support for each other and widening the scope of material that can be utilized.

- communicate using silence and simple gesture through to loud and gregarious dialogue as the situation demands

Do not target a specific group, i.e. they work with all seniors
What is an Elder-clown?

• An Elder-clown is a **professionally trained artist** who works in a program providing clown work with seniors at a residential care facility.

• They are known by many names e.g.:
  • Familial-clown,
  • ElderField
ELDER-CLOWNS:

USE

laughter; magic; music; slapstick; song;
story-telling; and, reminiscence techniques
TO

stimulate memory;

improve cognitive functioning,

spread smiles; and,

change the mood of residents and
the atmosphere of the facility
HIPPOCRATES (The Father of Western Medicine) advised that:

Physicians should cultivate a serious and respectable image, but at the same time use wit in interacting with patients because “dourness is repulsive both to the healthy and the sick.”
Presently, **clowns** work in hundreds of hospitals and healthcare settings in at least a dozen different countries around the world including **America, Canada, Britain, France, Brazil, Austria, Germany, Israel, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Australia.**
Data collected on the work of 18 clown-doctors

Through Instruments /observations of Work in:

12 Healthcare Facilities
(6 Hospitals / 6 facilities for Seniors )

Each facility visited

1-3 times per week
40+ weeks per year

• Interviews conducted with :
  • 18 clowns (3 times)
  • 18 healthcare team members
(towards the end of the project)
Down Memory Lane Program
2005-2007

Funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation

16 clowns working in pairs

10 facilities (senior residences, assisted living, complex continuing care and nursing home)

Each facility visited 1-3 times per week

40+ weeks per year for 1-3 years.

Visits to 200-225 residents (plus their families and staff) per week
Clinically significant

- 20% reduction in agitation symptoms in SMILE
- The same effect size as is achieved by antipsychotic medications used to treat agitation without the adverse side effects
SMILING and LAUGHTER Help to:

• STRENGTHEN immune ‘system’

• REDUCE stress, anxiety & depression

• IMPROVE mood + ability to cope with sadness & loss

• REDUCE perception of & tolerance to Pain

• INCREASE blood oxygenation and blood flow

• IMPROVE cardio-vascular/ heart health

• (Warren, Hind, & Holmes, 2014)
Elder-clowns help seniors:

- connect to their immediate surroundings
- recognize family members
- remember the past
- improve cognitive functioning and communication skills
- increase the quality of life for seniors, their families and for the healthcare staff who work with them
“NO ONE IS EVER DYING”
Hunter “Patch” Adams

“… all I can do is give him drugs for pain...
in many ways you are doing more for him than I can.”
palliative care physician

“Doctors, nurses and other therapists work
with the parts of the patient that are sick
...
Clown-doctors work with everything else.”
Ami Hattab
(Dr. Balthazaar,
*Le Rire Medecin, Paris*)
CANADIAN COUNCIL ON HEALTH SERVICE ACCREDITATION (2007)
IDENTIFIED
FOOLS FOR HEALTH’S CLOWN-DOCTORS

“LEADING PRACTICE”

“STANDARD OF CARE”
Fools for Health and Positive Psychology

MISSION

Organizational Mission: Health and Wellness

Mission Statement:
To foster a culture and environment that promotes health and well-being through ongoing education, training, and collaboration with organizations, communities, and individuals.

Vision Statement:
To lead the movement to create a world where all people achieve optimal health and well-being through a culture of health and wellness.

Organizational Values:

- Compassion
- Integrity
- Innovation
- Transparency

AWARDS

SITES
Positive Emotion

PERMA as described in Flourish (Seligman, 2011)
Engagement
Relationships
Meaning

“Facing a life threatening illness....
(is) a time of heightened emotions,
and therefore humour and
laughter have an integral place”

Professor David Currow

Chief Cancer Officer and CEO Cancer Institute, NSW
Previously Chair Palliative and Support Services, Flinders University, SA
Accomplishment
Could fill books and books:

**Smiles Are Everywhere**

*Integrating Clown-Play into Healthcare Practice*

**Bernie Warren**, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada and **Peter Spitzer**, Humour Foundation, Australia

www.routledgementalhealth.com/artstherapy
The ‘Naked Clown’
What are some ways that we can take the lessons of clowns into our work in gerontology?

Humour Board

“According to my research, laughter is the best medicine, giggling is good for mild infections, chuckling works for minor cuts and bruises, and snickering only makes things worse.”
Wearing Bright Colours
Confronting Culture
“Antennae Up!”

“clown doctors can learn lots about patients that the rest of us are too busy to see”

Dr. Sheila Horen.
Hospitalist, LDMH
The Power of a Smile
Thank you
For listening
Thank you to Bernie Warren, PhD for content, images, and...everything else!

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