

No More Balloons, Now what do I do!

-- Shobi Dobi

This is the cry I heard at the Western Shrine Convention. Apparently, the Shriners will no longer allow balloons in their hospitals. I believe this has come about because of latex sensitive liability. For many years caring clowns have used balloons as props, toys, and giveaways. So now what?

Besides stickers, there are other inexpensive give-a-ways that are fun for children and adults. Even adults like things that they can play around with staff members and visiting family.

Most of the items mentioned here are inexpensive, but they can really add up fast. Unless you are independently wealthy, try to get some group at the hospital to buy them for you. Look at the art on the facility walls and notice who donates to the hospital. Usually a volunteer auxiliary will not have a problem buying these items for you. Especially as it would cost as little as \$50.

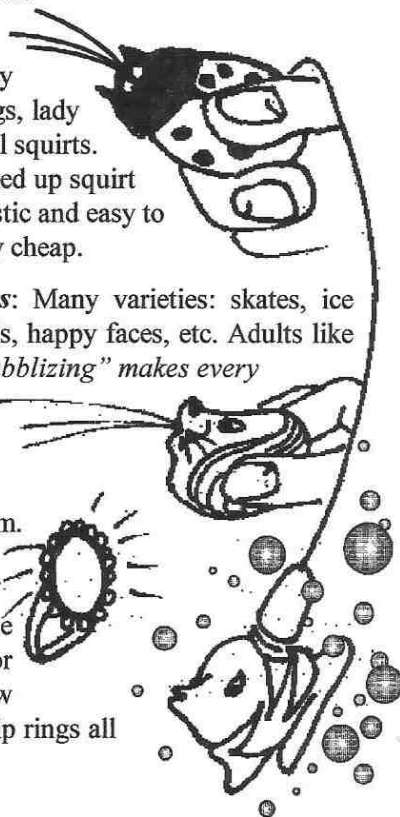
Here are some giveaways I enjoy:

Squirts: These little squeeze toys hold about a tablespoon of water. One squirt will not really get anyone (nurse) too wet. I always tell the nurse before I give a child a squirt, explaining that kids need to be naughty sometimes in order to be normal. They all agree and never have I had anyone not play along. Try to get squirts that are really easy to squeeze. I had a little boy in ICU that wanted desperately to squirt his mother and I ended up having to squeeze it for him. This missed the spontaneity of the naughtiness!

Oriental Trading Company ("OTC") has whales, frogs, lady bugs and how about eyeball squirts. (\$6.00 a dozen.) I've picked up squirt insects (which are thin plastic and easy to squirt) at party stores very cheap.

Bubble Bottle Necklaces: Many varieties: skates, ice cream cones, fish, animals, happy faces, etc. Adults like them too. I always say "bubblizing" makes every hospital room magical. (OTC \$6.50 a dozen).

Rings: Everyone loves them. Engage yourself to an 8 or 80-year-old with a plastic jewel or rhinestone ring (OTC - 6 dozen for \$6.50). There are rainbow plastic rings and friendship rings all about 10 cents each!



Tattoos: Eyeball tattoos on a bald head? Yep! Kids love them! (6 doz. for \$4.80), other tattoos, 6 doz. for \$3.60

Glow-in-the-dark Items: To keep a wee tot company at night. Tattoos (120 tattoos - \$12.00). Glow-in-the-dark bouncing eyeballs, vampire fangs, or Martian fingers. Please warn the night staff. We had a kid call in the nurse in the middle of the night and then opened up his mouth with his glowing vampire teeth. Let the kids be kids in the hospital and you'll find adults that will play too. How about glow-in-the dark slime crawlers!

Friendship Bracelets: Nylon rope Bracelets (6 doz. \$3.60) "Just something to remind them of you"

The list can go on and on. You can get more expensive: Fake teeth (\$7.20 a doz.); sticky body parts; magic rope tricks, disappearing ink, hats, back scratchers (72 for \$9.00); Smiley Face Mirrors (\$9 a doz.); felt tower and jester hats \$4-6 each; inflatable clown shoes (\$3.95). Can't you just see a little 4-year-old pushing his IV stand down the hall shuffling in his big shoes or keeping his big shoes in bed!

So How do We Carry All These Things to Tide You Over and Cheer You Up!

Sometimes the simplest things are the best. Here's one from "Silly Star" Sara Offutt of Hebron Indiana. I met her on the Internet and we chatted. She cleans out a big Tide box, lines it with contact paper, and puts on a handle. In it she keeps all those props for "something to tide you over until you go home!"

I was thinking of buying Tide just for the box as I usually use Cheer. And there it was right in front of my face a box to carry all those little giveaways "just to Cheer you up!"

One day in the laundromat, I saw, again right in front of my eyes, several people open those little 50 cent boxes of soap you get in the laundromat machines. They had Tide and Cheer! So now I frequent the Laundromat waste bin. (This is less embarrassing if you do it in "face," i.e., dressed in clown.) What a great giveaway. Take a sheet of your favorite jokes or inspirational quotes, copy it several times. And cut them up into little daily reminders of "cheer" or "just to Tide you over." The patient could keep the box on their night stand. Don't let it get cleaned up with the dirty linen or there will be cries like "Where's my Cheer!" or "Who stole my Cheer!"

