

Face painting in the Hospital

Joey, pictured below in the bat man face, loved to have his face painted. His brother David is the Hobo on the left. I remember how Shobi would cradle Joey's little head in her hand when she painted his face. Sometimes, he would even fall asleep.



David and Joey, Kaiser East Bay Medical Center in Oakland CA

Shobi would ask him "Do you want another color? He would say "Yes, that one over there," pointing behind him while his eyes were closed. Joey did not win his fight with cancer, but he certainly won a special place in Shobi's heart.

The picture is from 1995 when I started face painting in the hospital. I used designs from *Put on A Happy Face*, by Marcela Murad ("Mama Clown") when I first started. Now I carry a book of my own designs so the children can pick what they want usually pretty, funny or "scarey."

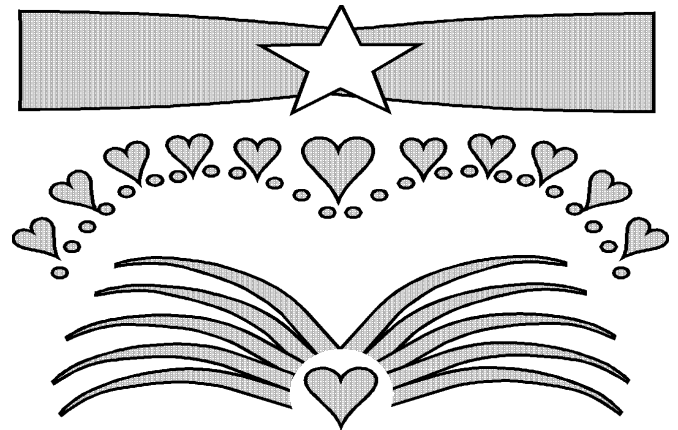
This is a chance to give real caring strokes to children in the hospitals or clinics. Face painting is one procedure in the hospital that doesn't cause pain. Often, it can take the patient's mind off their discomfort. It does wonders for the teen age girls and children who have lost their hair to chemotherapy.

Face painting can also be a transforming experience for a child. It can even be therapeutic. Years ago one Sunday when Shobi was painting at a Farmer's Market, she painted a 5 year old as a full face tiger. His father was wheeling him around in a wagon. Everyone was commenting "Oh how cute you are" or coming up and playing with him. The child was not thinking "The clown made me cute" The child was experiencing "I'm cute."

The next week a man came up to Shobi and said "Do you know what you've done to my son?" Shobi thought "Oh dear, what did I do." The father said "He has always been very shy and not very

outgoing. When you painted his face last week everyone, even strangers were telling him how cute he was. He became special. The local newspaper put his picture in the paper and his teacher put it up on his classroom wall. Thank you so much! He is having so much fun now in school."

On a little girl in ICU, I painted hearts on her forehead and put little rouge on her cheeks and a little lip gel on her lips. She was so excited and happy, because everyone was saying "my aren't you pretty!" and she was! Staff just lit up when they saw her. It is all part of play and imagination. It allows parent, siblings and staff to focus on something besides illness. I do a lot of full face painting in the hospital because of this reason. Other clowns have said "Well I paint on their hands where they can see it." Hand painting is fine, but it does not have the therapeutic affect that full face painting does. Head bands like the ones illustrated below work well because they are away from eyes and nose. Cats and tigers don't take a lot of paint and are so much fun. A little bit of color and a kitty will have a child smiling in a mirror at themselves.



Face Painting and Hygiene

What about infection control with face painting?

— Patty Wooten

Face painting without attention to infection control, can be an exciting activity for germs seeking relocation.

Let me tell you a little story about a happy little germ who was eager to relocate. *Betty Bacteria* lived a comfortable life in the warm, wet mucous membranes of Jimmy's nose. It was a perfect place, plenty of protein rich food and the climate was fabulous. On the weekends, she would migrate over to the open rash on his cheek. One day, the hospital clown came to facepaint. As the brush bristles moved across the open rash, *Betty Bacteria* was scooped up and carried away on the bristles. When the brush was dipped back into the face paint container, *Betty Bacteria* quickly jumped off.

The clown then went down the hall to another patient. As the brush slid across the paint, *Betty* was scooped up and deposited onto the face of another little girl. Quickly, *Betty Bacteria* scurried into the

nasal passage to hide, took up and began to reproduce. A few days later, the little girl got sick with the flu.

If the hospital clown was following Shobi's suggestions below, *Betty Bacteria* would never have traveled to another patient. The brush would not have touched the rash or runny nose, even if it had, *Betty Bacteria* would have been deposited onto the disposable paper palette and then tossed into the garbage before the clown left the room. And *Betty Bacteria* would soon die without a warm place to live. Proper use of infection control guidelines here interrupt the transfer of germs between patients. It is very important to be conscientious and meticulous when adhering to these guidelines as lives do depend on their use. Here are some guidelines for safe face painting in the hospital.

- Do not paint a face that has open wounds, rashes, severe acne or a surgical incision
- Wipe the face with a Handiwipe. This will remove dirt and help you insure skin integrity.
- Only use paint designated for face painting such as Snazaroo, Kryolan, and/or Mehron. Do not use acrylic paint on skin. Even though it is labeled as "non toxic," this rating signifies that it is not poisonous if swallowed. Acrylic paints can contain ingredients that are harsh on the skin and it is also difficult to scrub off.
- If you use glitter, make sure it is labeled "non toxic" and that it is not metallic. If in doubt, don't use any glitter at all.
- Use water soluble paint that comes in tubes. Fresh clean paint can be easily dispensed for each patient; therefore keeping the remaining paint clean. The more common small flat containers of makeup are not appropriate for hospital use due to contamination problems.
- Use a clean palette for each patient to mix your colors. A sketch pad from an art store works well as a palette. Use a clean sheet of paper for each patient
- Use disposable makeup applicators to apply the paint or try Q-tips.
- If the more traditional brush is used, use the brush for only one patient, then place it in a plastic bag until it can be cleaned at your home. You can use the same brush over and over for different colors on the same patient.
- At the end of the day, wash all your used brushes in hot water with a soap that contains an antimicrobial agent (see next page for details) and allow them to air dry.
- For added disinfecting, after your brushes are clean and dry, swirl them in 70% isopropyl alcohol (most rubbing alcohol) for about 10 minutes. You must swirl and swish your brushes in this solution so that the bristles are exposed to the liquid. Simply soaking them will not insure that the germicidal ingredients reaches all the fibers

The antimicrobial effectiveness of alcohol is sensitive to dilution with water. The "kill power" can be inactivated if it is diluted. (Rotter, p 1342) (Rutala, p. 1171) 70% isopropyl alcohol is a very effective germ killing agent and does not require extended contact time to kill most bacteria, virus and fungus. However to assure effectiveness all surfaces must be exposed to the alcohol.

Rotter, Manfred "Hand Washing and Hand Disinfection" Rutala, William. "Selection and Use of Disinfectants in Healthcare" from C. Gen Mayhall, (ed). Hospital Epidemiology and Infection Control, 2nd ed. Philadelphia, Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins, (1999).

Comments on Face Painting From Shobi

Ten minutes standing and watching swirling brushes is not something Shobi will do. So, I set a timer and watch the news on TV while I swirl my brushes. This is a discipline that I must abide by if I want to face paint in the hospital. Most of the face painting I do is with children and I certainly do not want to be responsible for causing them any more pain and illness than they already have. As I do a lot of commercial facepainting jobs, I have a separate face painting box for the hospital.



The tube colors come from Mehron and Kryolon. The Mehron come in fourteen colors. If you have special colors you like that do not come in tubes, you must take special care not to contaminate the colors.

When I get a new color for my commercial face painting business, I put clean new paint in one of these little containers that I use only at the hospital. I get the little makeup containers from Krylon -- Mama Clown also sells them. The tubes are really much easier, but I love some of the sparkle colors of Snazaroo and Kryolan, and so do the kids. When using these little containers in the hospital, dig out a bit of color and put it on the paper palette with a toothpick or coffee stir stick which in turn is thrown away. The idea is not to go from patient to patient as with *Betty Bacteria*.

Mama Clowns had all these face painting supplies at:
Silly Farm Products, 230 South 14th Avenue
Hollywood, FL 33020 954/923-6063
mamaclown2@aol.com / www.sillyfarm.com