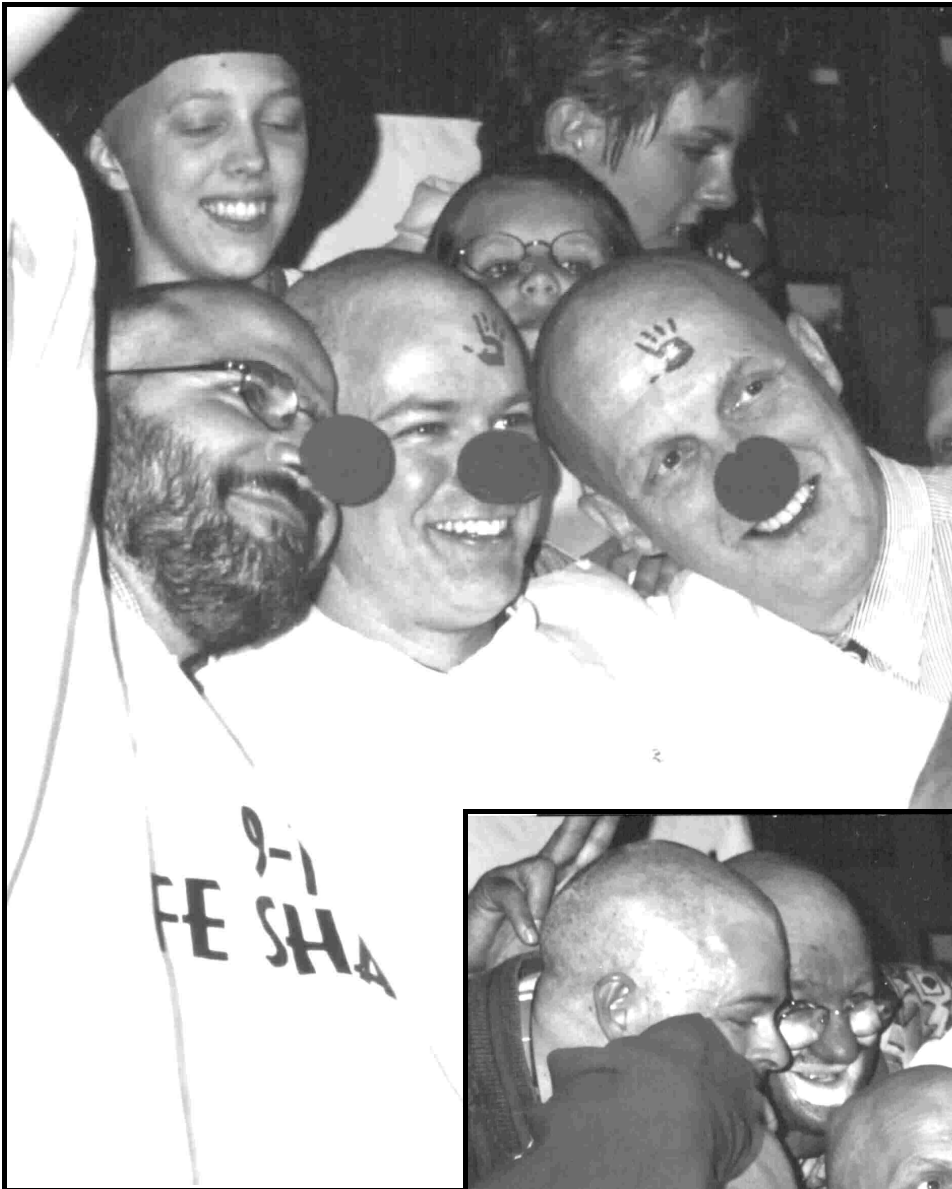


# Hospital Clown Newsletter

A Publication for Clowns In Community and World Service

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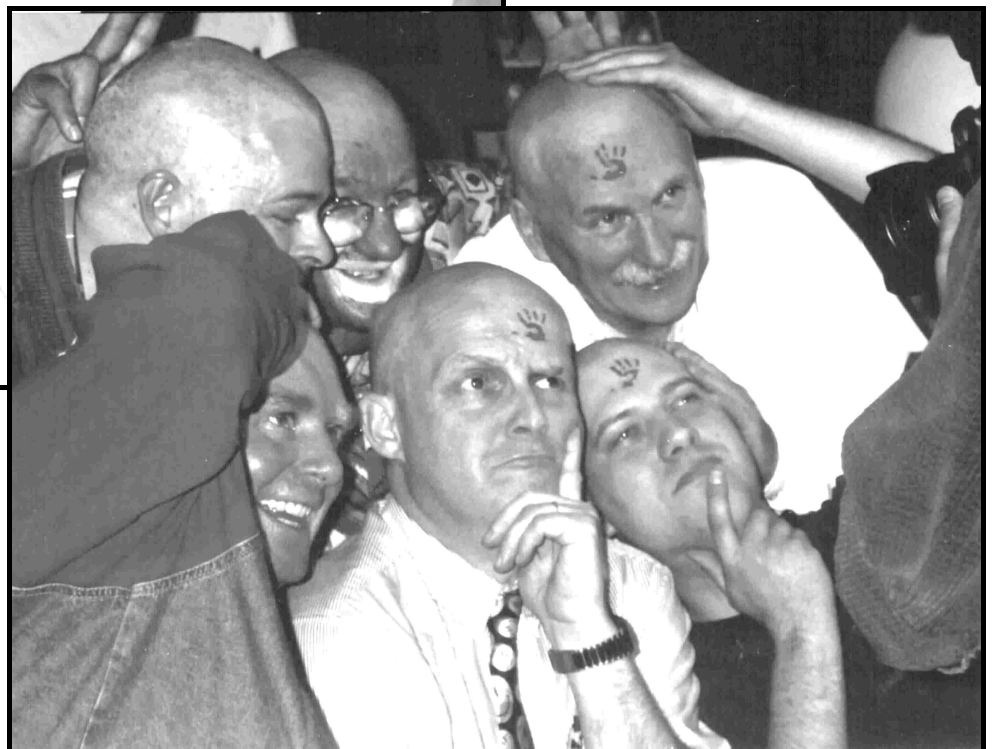


## Per Mission to Play

It is part of the Hospital Clown's mission to encourage hospital staff to not only smile, giggle, and laugh, but to play. The same love, care and attention we give to patients, we need to give to hospital staff.

At the Calgary 911 Life Shavers a "fund-razor" for the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta Canada, doctors get their heads shaved, by child cancer survivors, with a red clown nose bonus,

The hand print on their foreheads is a symbol of Kids Cancer Care Foundation.



The doctors pictured on this page are from Alberta Children's Hospital: Dr. Max Coppes, Director of Children's Oncology; Dr. Maarten Egeler, Deputy Director, Children's Oncology; Dr. Johannes Wolff, Staff Oncologist, Brain Tumor Researcher; and Dr. Ron Anderson, Head of Clinical Care. The rodeo clown in the picture on the right is Slim Weegar.

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# Per Mission to Play

So why is everyone in Canada shaving their heads? For cancer research. The cover photos are from an event for **Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta** in September 1999. The event called *911-Shavers* referring to emergency personnel, raised \$275,000. The whole city got involved -- a huge celebration for these kids with cancer. The kids who already had their hair loss, got to shave the heads of their doctors. Thousands came out to downtown Calgary to have their heads shaved -- police officers, emergency paramedics, politicians, celebrities and even one of Calgary's EMS clowns "Stitches the Clown" aka Bonnie Williams. She went around and got pledges and raised \$6500 to have her head shaved. The next year the campaign was called *Shave Your Lid for a Kid*. This year it will again be called *911-Shavers*

Now it seems all of Canada is shaving their heads to fight cancer. School children are shaving their heads as a way of supporting their classmates with hair loss from chemo. And there are many "hair razor events" happening like *Crop a Cop*, or *Buzz the Fuzz* and even a *Conehead Hall of Fame*. These events provide entertainment as well as funds for cancer research. It's all in the spirit of fun and it's permission to play. [For more on the Calgary Clowns see Page 6]

## **Staff that Plays Together, Stays together**

We clowns are always working with status -- one up and one down, like Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy. Think about the status shifts when a child shaves the head of an authority figure -- be it cop, teacher, or preacher. The same kind of play happens as the hospital clown doctor takes a "fall" or a child teaches the clown a joke or a trick. It's all in play.

This shift takes us to team spirit. Laughing and playing together has a way of putting us on the same level. It makes us familiar - it makes us all family. And a family that plays together stays together. Play is celebration of life. When staff is confronted with death and suffering every day, what could be more important that to celebrate life? Hospital staff working in critical services can become very close -- like family. That closeness can get pretty uncomfortable without a good dose of humor. Staff that plays together stays together.

Corporate America is fast learning this fact! Karyn Buxman, MSN, CSP, a member of AATH writes and compiles a weekly electronic bulletin LyteBytes© She is one of many groups dedicated to working with organizations to realize the importance of humor at work. *Copyright 2001 by HUMORx™™. e-mail tosubscribe-lytebytes@humorx.com*

HUMOR AT WORK: from LyteBytes©

At BizLand.com, every employee receives a monthly "fun budget" of \$15 for toys for the office. The office (in MA) now has remote control cars, a mini-la crosse set, inflatable furniture, and Nerf toys of all kinds. Marketing manager Tricia O'Neil purchased the LaCrosse set and explains, "Our hallways at (work) make a perfect playing field. I can teach others the basics of LaCrosse, have a little break, and improve my agility with a little pick-up game."

*"In medieval times the jester served an important function. He made the king laugh at himself. He lightened the otherwise heavy tone. He made the king remember he was a man like everyone else, experiencing the failings and frailties of the human condition. The jester helped the king preserve his sanity and his humanity. I think I should like to be a fool for peace."*

*Christian Hageseth, III, MD,  
A Laughing Place: the Art & Psychology  
of Positive Humor in Love & Adversity*

Play is participatory. It is usually in the body and not the mind. Even if it starts out with a joke or a riddle, it ends in a giggle which exercises the central nervous system (located around the heart). It is spontaneous and in the moment. We are allowed for a moment to appreciate the present time instead of projecting forward and backward as we adults are in such a habit of doing.

## **Powerlessness**

One of the prevailing feelings around the hospital is that of powerlessness for patients, staff, family and clowns. Being faced with uncertainty, suffering, contemporary medical technology and managed care is not only overwhelming for the patient, the family, but also for the staff. We all have times when we know we make a difference - even in the smallest little smile from a tiny child or a dying person, but we are still faced with the desire to fix, cure, heal, and relieve suffering. Sometime, we can help in that way and sometimes we are left very powerless.

Shobi has seen staff sitting alone in a room crying. She knows better than to intrude on someone's privacy -- after all the staff did seek out a room to be alone. But Shobi kept track of the nurse and later said "Do you need a hug?" Shobi's never been refused yet.

Humor has a way of balancing the scales even for a moment. For the child it gives them a sense of power over their situation. And not far from that, in an adult, it deflates those feelings of powerlessness.

Humor, however, can do more for powerlessness. Jackie Garner in a telephone conversation last week said she saw a nurse come out of a child's room in tears. He was just so frustrated because he could not do more for the child. She approached him in character "I betcha you could use a hug." After the hug she pulled out her silly monkey. When you squeeze the monkey the ears spin around. "It is just so stupid you gotta laugh," Jackie said. When the nurse saw it, he laughed out loud. Then he took the monkey into the child's room and spread the giggle.

## **Facilitator of Giggles**

Can you even imagine what it must be like for a surgeon to operate on people all day, or a nurse to tend to sick and suffering people day in and day out? It has to be part of our mission to play with these well deserving people. Not just the nurse, and doctors, but the people who clean the floors and disinfect the rooms, clean the bathrooms, and mop up the operating rooms.

Yes, sometimes the staff is busy and seems to not want to be bothered. I remember once in ER the nurses actually pushed me "Go into the doctor's Room" That is where the doctor's write up their reports. There was a doctor busy in the corner. I tip-toed into

the room. "Hi, Can I come in?" He responded without really looking up, "No, I'm too busy for that." "OK I responded" and turned to leave. "Wait a minute" he called after me. "I guess I need you" I just dusted him off and gave him a "Star of courage" (See Page 6). He smiled went back to his work and I left. With all the publicity humor and health is getting, staff is realizing they need the diversion. It's actually getting easier for us.

So the next time I run into that stern nurse or grumpy ER clerk, I will look behind their facade and see them as people who work hard and deserve the best clown I can be. Just like I am with the children and the adult patients.

Well, we are hospital staff too. So we too deserve to play! It is all a matter of balancing our routes through the hospital. I started keeping track of the areas of the hospital and even asked an administrator where there were isolated offices I might visit. I found the medical transcribers in a corner basement office without a window. I put them on my route. And let's face it, the added benefit of playing with staff is getting their support for your programs.

### ***We Need to be the Spirit of Play***

Most of us do a little magic, a little riddle, a little joke -- a little shtick, to "get in the door." But we need to do more, we need to be enthusiastic with our play -- we need be the spirit of play.

Play is a natural activity of childhood and possibly the most effective means of learning for children. With children, play is practice for real life. It has within it enough fantasy to provide for events and situations, people and objects. As children grow they learn that play isn't real, but in some ways it still has real life results. Play provides a safe environment for practice of behaviors with consequences by which the child learns. Play therapists have learned to utilize this play environment with role-playing as a sort of rehearsal and/or practice for "real" life.

In the hospital adult play has in the same way real effect. Besides just releasing tension, it offers human contact usually through laughter. It opens communications and cools anger. It is quite impossible to be really angry and belly laugh at the same time (because within seconds you will be laughing at yourself for being angry!) Play results in fun, fun invokes joy, and joy is the pulse of love. So this is the big bundle of love we carry into the hospital. And they deserve it and need it.

So what does all this mean? Play with staff, and when they are not around just play by yourself. It is amazing how your playful energy will affect others. The hospital is full of ridiculous things to play with. Close you eyes and imagine Charlie Chaplin in the hospital. It doesn't have to be big, loud or hazardous, just playful childish curiosity will do. It is the spirit of play that will be contagious. If you are more than one clown play with each other. Don't just walk down the hall, row an imaginary boat, walk an imaginary tight rope, chase an imaginary butterfly and lose it.

### ***Gallows Humor***

This is a phrase coined by Sigmund Freud discussing a man joking as he is about to be hanged. A good example of gallows humor is the TV series "MASH." In a real life situation the humor would be a real survival necessity. The show/play is practice for survival.

From Patty Wooten Compassionate Laughter

"Gallows humor is a type of medical humor usually seen as hostile, inappropriate, or "just plain sick," by the people who are unfamiliar with healthcare professions. Gallows humor acknowledges the disgusting or intolerable aspects of a situation, and attempts to transform it into something lighthearted and amusing . . . . It is important to note that gallows humor, so therapeutic for staff, may not be appreciated by patients or their families."

As clowns, unless we are medical personnel, it may not be appropriate for us to participate in gallows humor. Shobi has never approached this type of humor, but then again it is not Shobi's character to do this. Her other character Dicky Dude would have not problem with this, but then again he doesn't go to the hospital (he would faint at the sight of blood). Actually he would be fine with the staff, just not with anyone else. If you are also a medical personnel and have privy to the camaraderie of this humor, it may be appropriate. Shobi's motto is always to "tread lightly on foreign territory."

### ***What is appropriate play with staff?***

*by Patty Wooten*

Hospital clowns can bring much needed "comic relief" to the hospital staff. Health professionals work hard and witness hopeless situations. We keep an open, caring heart and deliver compassionate care. Some of our patients get well and go home, others suffer and die. Our work is serious, people's lives depend on it. Some days it's hard to remember the playful, joyful side of life. When the clown walks in, we remember, we reconnect, we feel rejuvenated. When a clown energizes the staff, that energy is then passed along to many other patients. Hospital staff need the joy and balance that the clown brings.

Clowning with the staff can be great fun; however, remember the staff are very busy. You may need to keep your routines brief. If someone is on the phone, don't interrupt them - wait until the call is over. If staff are engaged in a serious conversation, don't interrupt or if you do, be sensitive to their need to return to the conversation. Walking into the nursing station may be frowned upon by hospital staff, or it may be perfectly okay. Be sensitive, ask the nurse manager if it's okay for you to clown with staff inside the nurse's station.

Of course, nurses love it when you tease the doctors and get them to join in the fun. Be careful not to offend them with loud, boisterous activity or by pushing them into awkward situations. Medical staff can be a powerful ally; impress them with your sensitivity. Wouldn't it be great to see doctors' orders for "hospital clown to visit daily". Don't forget to include all the staff: the housekeeper, patient transport people, engineering, dietary personnel, and anyone else you see on the unit. Learn to read the hospital ID name badges, and prepare some funny responses for the different disciplines. For example: "Oh, Sally, you're the Social Worker, you're just the person I need to see. Could you get me a date for Friday night?" If the housekeeper is running the floor polisher, ask for a shoe shine.

From The Hospital Clown: A Closer Look, Schwebke/Wooten,