

Per Mission to Play: Puppet Play

Puppets are the easiest way to play with staff. Puppets need no introduction, they are immediately recognized as play.

Mona O'Lovely is my clown partner and she is the staff's favorite. She used to be Mona Love, but she was given the name O'Lovely by the Mayor of Glasgow Scotland. She is a real character and has a mind of her own. I never know what she is going to say. A puppet has its own character and therefore can improvise with you -- sort of like clown schizophrenia or multiple personalities.

The Chief Medical Office at my hospital always unties Mona's shoes and gives her false teeth. Most staff say "Hello" to Mona before they even greet me. She is a very popular character.



Hello, Mona O'Lovely here.

I just want to tell you how much fun it is going to be at that hospital. I especially like to flirt with the male doctors. Snickerdoodle gave me a "wolf whistle" when I was in Boise and I use it all the time. I think it makes the doctors blush, but I'm out there lookin' at all those handsome guys. Just cause I'm nine hundred and ninety-nine don't make no difference.

And them nurses they are lots of fun too. I love them all and tell them so all the time. They work hard and need it. And I really like the receptionist. She always gives me a good handshake and looks me in the eye like I'm a real person -- which I am of course.

Love ya, Mona O'Lovely

[Editor's 2010 Note: Mona has sisters all over the world, but Folkmanis Puppets stopped making the witch puppet a few years ago. www.folkmanis.org]

Sight Gags

I will never forget *Ski* (Don Bertowski) my first caring clown teacher -- all he had to do was stop and look at someone with his pitiful hobo look to get a giggle. He was so ridiculously out of place in the hospital. He would carry around an old grubby paint can with a used painter's brush saying "Anyone want their face painted?" Or he would shuffle down the hall of a hospital pushing an IV pole with a plastic bag containing a real gold fish at the top. (This inspired Shobi to carry fish stickers for patients' IV fluids.)

Michael Christensen, "Dr. Stubs," gets mileage out of his rubber chickens. He puts them up on the x-ray screens, on top of a bed of lettuce in the cafeteria, or stops and gives his chicken patient CPR..

It's the ridiculously unexpected that makes it funny. In the hospital there is plenty to play with. Mary O'Brien of Boise gets those little toy GI soldiers, and announces that "the hospital is offering more choices in health care these days...today's options are the upper GI (hold one GI really high in the air) or the lower GI (hold the other one really low)." It gets a giggle, especially at the lab and around the surgery floor staff."

Shobi puts balloon mice in the laundry hampers and little fish balloons in mop buckets. In effect, all the paradability sight gags work for the staff. It is an excuse and a reminder to play.

Then if they indicate they have a little more time, you can sing them a little number -- like "3" or a really big number like "999". You can tell them the joke of the day, check out their hearts with a funny sounding stethoscope or make up nice things out of the letters on their badges (RN = Real Nice, LPN = Lotta Pretty Nurse, RT = Real Thing MD -- "Does that stand for Make Do or Major Dude?") Shobi plays her little violin (that really plays itself) at the nurses station. It's all improv and it's all with enthusiastic play -- the playful child in hospital wonderland.

Give Aways

Giving things to children and adults at regular events can have an adverse effect causing clowns to get "give-me" mobbed or forming a "give-me" line. In these cases the clown-person relationship changes to clown-in-charge or clown-as-administrator. In hospitals, give-aways are received quite differently, especially with adults. The first time I realized this was when a patient said, "Don't you have anything that you can give me to remind me of you?" She didn't really mean ME, she meant "remind me of the fun, play of the clown." So that's when giveaways became important to me.

Badge of Courage

Last issue I showed you all the fun stuff I made with paper foam shapes and smiley faces. On my valentine trip to the craft store to find heart shapes for "Have a heart" or "Need some heart" I found stars. So of course I gave away "you're the star here" This turned into asking "Who is the star today?" I get replies as "Give it to James, he had to deal with Mrs. Smith today or clean up after . . . " or whatever. I come back weeks later and they are still wearing their star. So now I call them a "badge of courage." If you can't find the precut ones, you can cut them out of any foam paper.



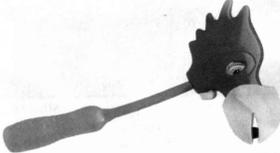
I've also discovered a new Foam Glue. It attaches foam to anything. I had trouble with the others coming off the clothes pins. I can't tell you how easy these clothes pins are to put on stuff.

Downwards they clip into doctor's pockets, upwards onto badges, or computer stands, etc. I put a "Need a hand" on the busy ER triage nurses stand. I didn't get a comment until the next day. "I was almost losing it and looked up and there was this silly hand with a smiley face on it. Made my day!"

Clown Noses are always appreciated. *Boomer*, Al Bryant of Boise Idaho, carries around a bouquet of red noses. He gets the stems at a craft stores and put red noses on the ends. So you get to "pick" your own nose, I mean rose." Shobi teaches staff how to "palm" the noses so they can magically pick them out of a funny bone. I loved it one day when I saw a group of interns rounding a corner to go into a patient's room – they all had on the clown noses I had given them a few days before. [HCN sells them cheap to hospital clowns - See Supplement B for details]

Toys: Hammers and Groaners

Try to get the program to pay for these things or the volunteer axillary. You can get a lot of things from Rhode Island Design (800) 528-5599 really cheaply, but you need to make a \$75 order. Fun Express, which is Oriental Trading Company's even cheaper company, is (800) 228-0122 Int'l phone: (402) 596 2660 Here are a few: The parrot makes a wacky noise -- great for popping bubbles. A groan hammer is one that makes a groaning sound when you turn it up-side-down.

			
CA-TALPA 1 Dozen Minimum \$9.00/Dozen 6 Dozen/Half Case \$7.50/Dozen 12 Dozen/Case \$6.00/Dozen <i>1 Dozen/Display</i>	10" Talking Parrot	CA-BUBSG 2 Dozen Minimum \$8.40/Dozen 12 Dozen/Half Case \$7.20/Dozen 24 Dozen/Case \$5.40/Dozen <i>2 Dozen/Display</i>	Smile Bubble Groan Hammer
			
CA-CLHAM 3 Dozen Minimum \$5.25/Dozen 12 Dozen/Half Case \$4.50/Dozen 24 Dozen/Case \$3.40/Dozen	10" Clown Hammer	CA-GRHSM 2 Dozen Minimum \$6.75/Dozen 12 Dozen/Half Case \$5.75/Dozen 24 Dozen/Case \$4.50/Dozen <i>2 Dozen/Display</i>	Smile Face Groan Hammer

Don't forget wacky glasses (like groucho glasses) or sticky body parts, fussy pencils, fart cushions and the ever popular tongue rollers (the little animals that when you squeeze them the tongue rolls out.)

The Magic of Mouth Coils.

Every clown who has been to a convention knows what these are. But for the benefit of those of you who may not be community clowns, these are a one time use tightly stuffed magic gimmick that you put in your mouth, shoe, or small space and then you pull out 17 or so feet of linked rainbow streamers. I love to use them near the operating area and then beg the doctors to help me. In a Chinese school, I walked into a classroom that was being taught a loud song. I didn't feel like being loud, so I saw a clothes line around the room with clothes pins. I "palmed" a mouth coil into my mouth and proceeded to pull out all the colorful paper rings and pinned them around the room. I did this very quietly and even when the kids got wind of me doing it I just kept a straight face and finished the room and left (with a little wave of my hand behind me). It was one of those clown perfect moments.

Not all mouth coils are the same. As they are not reusable, we tend to get the less expensive ones. Be careful what you buy. The best are made by David Cresey. A dozen 17 foot ones are \$9, 25 foot are \$10; the 45 foot are \$15 (they are really a mouthful!)

The gloves are back from exile.

I first got them from the ER staff. I showed them how to draw a face on them and "tie" them. They are non Latex, called Purple Nitrile and they are a lovely shade of purple! They don't blow up as large as the latex, but they do blow up enough. They are impossible to tie, so I use tiny poodle (or pony tail) rubber bands and twist them several times around the twisted end of the glove I use to tie.

I've used these in every country I've been in and every situation. They are just so easy to bounce around, play volley ball with – anyone can hit them as they stay up in the air so well. I use them in lobbies, hall, clinics, airports, airplanes, and historical sites which change into hysterical sites in a few bounces. It allows everyone to PLAY. Am I making my point? It's fine to get someone to giggle, but it's even better to get them to participate.

