

The Hospital Clown: Friend, Fellow Human Being and Entertainer

Excerpts from an article by Bent Eikard
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Shobi's trip to Denmark was sponsored by Bent to help stimulate interest in hospital clowning and by John Newman and the Danish International Clown Festival in Svendborg. Shobi was there for ten days and visited hospitals nearly everyday. What I found in Denmark was a very receptive professional staff. Many doctors came to me eager to learn about what is happening in the states and around the world.

Bent Eikard has not only taken on the Danish Health System to promote hospital clowning, he is active in forming a Scandinavian Hospital Clown organization and recently he visited the Swedish clowns. [We will report on them in a future issue] As a retired doctor, he has all the knowledge, connections and status to speak to the Danish Health Community.

I have included these excerpts because they show his understanding of the hospital clown work. And after all it is The Journal of the Danish Medical Association.



. . .Clowning to a great extent consists of magnifying experiences and reactions all the way into the absurd. It is entertaining, but the perspective goes much further. . . There is reality in the clown's understanding and exaggeration. He is holding a mirror in front of us, exaggerating our emotions and making our emotions legal. The hospital clown is a caring, loving, discreet and empathetic figure who has a very good sense for a situation. He relates to the individual child or adult often over a long period of time. The caring clown is giving and puts himself to the side and is appearing not in order to get applause but enters in order to cooperate with the caring staff and the treatment staff. The obvious example is a frightened child who just can not stand the idea of getting just another injection. The caring clown can catch and mirror back the *dis-ease* and fear, make it bigger and absurd and in this way take it on. It is laughter provoking and will in the best of all worlds make the child relax and become softer.

The caring clown rests quietly in the present, and takes spontaneous clues that arise from a situation and surroundings.

Authenticity.

The most important prerequisite [for a hospital clown] is authenticity. Children are world champion at figuring out if the adults around them are authentic. No matter how many clown tricks or jokes a clown has, if they are done without presence, without soul, without love and authenticity in relationship to children, they know it. You have to be somewhat of a child yourself in order to become a really good clown.

Cooperation with the staff

The clown can add to and open some of the emotional channels that the staff are not about to access. Adults that are around sick children need to play more as it will be beneficial for the children. We adults have a hard time accessing our inner child. However, the more you play, the easier it gets, and the more you will want to

play. The same is the case for clown miming. It is a great communication tool, but you have to overcome the fear of looking silly and acting silly, because that is what works. Hopefully those without a red nose can find inspiration in the clown's handling of pain and worry by getting out the humor and make situations manageable for both adults and children. And thus reducing the risk of burn out, especially on wards with very sick patients and heavy care work. To be in the hospital is a difficult experience for most children and parents, but a clown with heart and feeling can loosen up many traumatic situations and can help improve the ward environment. To discover a clown in the hallways can break up sad thoughts and everyday running of the hospital. The presence of the clown not only lightens up the situation, but also enhances the feelings of security for the worried parents. This is what a pilot project has been showing at Skejby Hospital.

Klovnekorps ~ Clown Squad

Mostly the job of a hospital clown is still done on a voluntary basis. It is our hope that the clown can be paid through organizations and in the future the clown will be part of the hospital budget. Skejby Hospital has for the second year successfully supported a clown project with two hospital clowns - Birgit Bang Mogensen and Ewan MacKinnon. The project is funded by the Patient and Family Fund called The Humor and Health Project. The project will report on the ways clowns can be a relieving and healing addition to treatment in Danish hospitals. The aim is to have a country covered with Clown Squads.

Not that the hospital should be all fun and tricks, but the aim is to open up some joy in all the sorrow and to improve the quality of life of hospitalized children. We would like to see the Red Nose Squad in all Children's Hospitals in Denmark whether or not it is proven to enhance the immune system. It has shown that this humor improves the quality of life of hospitalized children, their parents and the hospital staff.