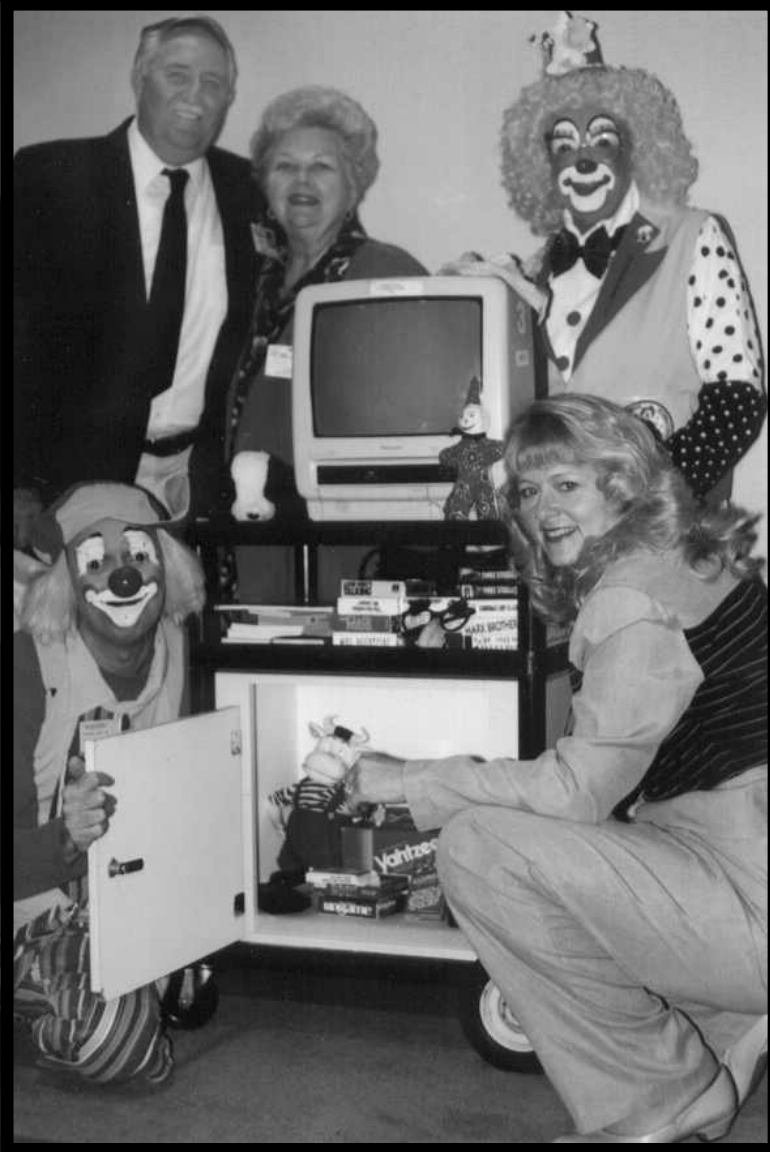


Hospital Clown Newsletter

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Leslie Gibson is on the bottom right of the Humor Cart. Ray "OK" Teasdale is holding the door. The clown standing is Jean "Daffodil" McNab, the couple is Bob and Joan Barry (see page 2)

Leslie Gibson and Therapeutic Humor Programs

In the late 1980's, there was a surge of humor energy in the world. So many humor health related clown programs began at this time. Maybe when things get so serious, the Universe reminds us we are uniquely wonderful not because of our material power, but because of our ability to laugh and love.

AATH (Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor) was founded in 1988; Michael Christensen of the Big Apple Circus started the Clown Care Units® in New York. Richard Snowberg began the Caring Clown training at Clown Camp at the University of Wisconsin and wrote *The Caring Clown*. Karen Rid started The Robo Project. Patch Adams began his ambassador clown trips to Russia. And Leslie Gibson started a hospital humor program.

All these "pioneers" of the Caring Clown have their own emphasis depending on their particular background. Michael Christensen, a professional clown, brings the very special skills necessary for clowning with children. His Clown Docs have influenced programs all over the world. Richard Snowberg was a Professor at UWisconsin. He brought education to the community clown at Clown Camp. Today these clowns serve mostly as volunteers in community hospitals and nursing homes all over the country. Karen Rid was a Child Life Specialist, so her emphasis was the therapeutic use of clowning, and launched the Therapeutic Clowns of Canada. Patch Adams, being a doctor saw the need to *humor-ize* the entire healthcare system. Leslie Gibson with her experience in healthcare and healthcare administration saw the potential of involving the whole hospital in a Humor Program. She has influenced programs around the world. Two programs are covered in this issue.

The Comedy Connection of Morton Plant Mease Health Care in Clearwater Florida has been in successful operation since 1989. Leslie Gibson, who was then employed in the Department of Home Health, is now with Florida SunCoast Hospice. The Comedy Connection is the umbrella for the Comedy Carts, Clown Alley, and Out Reach Programs and most recently a hospice program - The Smile Team.

The Therapeutic Humor Program of Rochester General Hospital in New York was inspired by the program in Florida and has adapted to a program in this large General Hospital. Debbie Nupp anchors this program as Director. She is employed by the hospital as director of the program and as a pediatric nurse.

Both programs integrated complete humor program in their hospitals and support comic videos, humor libraries and outreach programs and clown programs for clown rounds.

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Leslie Gibson

I first met Leslie, as Shobi, at the AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) Conference in Florida in 1996 with the members of her Comedy Connection Clowns. I was extremely new to the field of health care and totally unexposed to the professionals in the humor and health field. After a decade visiting conferences and programs all over the world, I have a new appreciation for Leslie and the pioneer work that she has accomplished in this field.

Leslie is a graduate of Purdue University School of Nursing. She is an internationally recognized speaker and educator who specializes in utilizing humor in the community, corporations and health care facilities. She currently writes a column in three professional journals: "Lighten Up" for Vital Signs Magazine, "Grin & Share It" for Nursing 99 Magazine and "Comic Relief" for Urologic Nursing Journal.

She is the founder of "Comedy Connection" in the Morton Plant Mease Hospital, and has in the past two years founded "The Smile Team" at Hospice of the Florida Sun Coast Below are excerpts from articles, an interview, and long telephone conversations with Leslie. Her story begins with Stella's story.

. . . It all started with Stella's Story

Stella was in her 90s and had fallen in her home fracturing her hip. It was three days before Meals on Wheels found her and called 911. When they rushed her to the hospital, they found she was legally deaf and blind. After surgery, as Stella had no immediate family, she was sent to a nursing home for physical therapy and total care.

While Stella was at the nursing home, she was violent, combative, and labeled "confused." She was fighting the staff and they had to separate her at night because she was a screamer. The nursing home's administrator called Stella's neighbor to make other arrangements for Stella's care.

I was working in Medicare Home Health Services at that time. Stella's neighbor called me requesting advice. We made arrangements to bring Stella back to her own home with 24 hour live-in attendants.

Stella's neighbor had heard of the humor I had done with patients and asked "Do you think humor will help this patient?" I said "I don't know." I was really just doing humor to have some fun with the home health care patients I visited, I never, never thought of what was going to come out of this.

My husband had gotten a new video camera. It was a toy for him and he wanted to video tape everything. So he came with me on my first visit. It is probably one of the smartest things I ever did -- video taping this session. I may not have believed it afterwards. And the tape has been played all over the country since.

Stella could hear with two hearing aids so we put on a walkman and I played a Burns and Allen comedy tape which I had gotten at the library -- just to see if she would respond to comedy. What happened was nothing short of a miracle, and you can actually see the transformation on the video tape. You see Stella trashing around and then you can see her start laughing as she recognized Gracie Allen's voice from the radio. She started repeating the jokes like she was telling them. We started breaking through to her.

It turned out she was not "confused" she was sensory deprived. She was a real Helen Keller case. That's what got me intrigued -- maybe this is a therapy. I'd wake up at night and think, "How many people are put on drugs because they are labeled confused, when they really need humor and positive stimulation?"

Our relationship grew rapidly into a trusting warm friendship. The therapeutic use of humor served as a tool to bridge this exclusion she found with the loss of sensory perceptions. By helping to restore her sense of humor, an improved attitude and mental acuity were quickly achieved.

I often challenged Stella to find some new humorous material. This gave her great joy and added a new sense of purpose to her life. As humans we all have the need to feel a purpose for our life.

As Stella grew more alert, she became receptive to learning to walk again. It took nearly a year before she was able to walk alone (with a walker). Stella's doctor was amazed at her improvement. She started bringing a new funny stories into his office each visit. He shook his head saying, "With her sense of humor, she might outlive me!"

Award from the Humor Project

That's when I started my own journey on humor and health. I read Anatomy of an Illness by Norman Cousins and learned as much as possible about the mind-body connection. Then I found a tape at the library entitled the "Power of Laughter and Play" by Alison Crane. I called her and she told me about the Humor Project in Saratoga Springs New York. She was just starting to get involved in the humor and health area. This was in 1987, the year she founded the American Association of Therapeutic Humor.

In 1988, I went to the Humor Project conference in Saratoga Springs, New York. After the conference, the evaluation form had this sentence to be completed: If you could do more with humor, what would you do? My simple answer was to place humorous materials on carts and take them to patients' bedsides. I was awarded a grant to pursue this idea, but it was still a year of preparation before we could start the program.

HOW TO START A HUMOR PROGRAM

Excerpt from "Laughter, The Universal Language" p. 64

The purpose of developing a humor program in an institutional setting is to promote stress reduction and relaxation. Obviously, anyone who has been taken from the security of their home and family experiences fear and the subsequent stress provokes anxiety. A patient in a hospital setting may be faced with painful testing or surgical procedures. This guide and videotape should provide an example of how to prepare and promote therapeutic humor.

Therapeutic humor serves as an adjunct to the medical support as well as a diversional tool to relieve these fears.

Assigning key people to serve as advocates is critical to the success of the program. The initial starting committee should include enough people to organize individual humor projects. These include someone to prepare videotapes, audio cassettes, cartoon albums, costumes, humor books, bulletin boards, gags and games. The materials gathered should offer a wide variety and be suitable to the age group being served.

Many toys can be found which are adaptable for the bed-bound patient. Hand-held toys and puppets are popular, as well as traditional card and board games. Cartoon books, artists pads and crossword puzzles can promote lighthearted creativity. Patients love to use clown wigs to cover their hair and may borrow a magic "trick" to surprise their family members.

The most popular items provided by the humor program are the audio and video tape selections. It is necessary to screen the media and provide a selection list for the participants.

A humor room, or a comedy cart explores a unique rehabilitation technique which enhances one's ability to cope with mental and physical health problems. At first, the patient may use humor as a defense mechanism to help survive the difficult times. Developing a humor program will help the patient and staff stimulate and strengthen a new perspective on life!

There was a lot of laughter and sharing as each department added to the cart.

At that time there were no official humor programs in any accredited hospital Bernie Segal was one of the early supporters. Once he came to visit and even wheeled our cart down the hall.

The Humor Cart

One of the most popular forms of bedside humor came from upbeat videotapes, such as comedies or musicals. We give out a card which announces the program to all patients who enter the hospital. They can order games, audio tapes, or videos through a nurse. A volunteer or a clown, if one is on duty, will deliver the cart. It takes a lot of organization to keep track of all the carts, tapes and games.

Publicizing the humor cart is important. One way we do this is with a meal tray place mat. This is a great idea. It's really a regular letter size piece of colored paper printed on both sides with puzzles, riddles, quotes, amusing stories, jokes and trivia. Things the patient can use to pass time with a bit of humor. Actually it would be a fun thing for any hospital clown to provide and would work to get your name and work out there in the public and community eye. It is all ammunition for funding which we need for videos, cart, and supplies. Our clowns are volunteers, but our clown teachers are paid.

We also do a "Patient Survey" which is returned with the video. This serves to validate the program, and again it is getting the program visible. Staff and community awareness is very important when building these programs and the results are obvious.

Program Beginnings

I was only working part time at Morton Plant Hospital as I had small children. So, my work has been volunteer time. I realized I needed some administrative collaboration. I went to the Director of Education, Dr. Nancy Rue, at Morton Plant Mease Health Care Center with a packet of information and together we brainstormed the hospital cart idea. She had been a pediatric nurse and understood the power of humor with children. "When children are sick," she said, "we use puppets and toys to help them get well. Some times adults need diversion tools as well."



she said, "we use puppets and toys to help them get well. Some times adults need diversion tools as well."

Involving the Whole Hospital

We both understood the importance of involving the whole hospital so we gave each department an area to develop (videos, games, books, toy section, etc.). The pilot project was on one wing only. When the project made its debut, we had a large celebration where each department added their project to the first humor cart.



Leslie and her daughter Ashley in their first costume which were actually made by the enthusiastic auxiliary.

Viewing Humor Videos - Legal Considerations

There are no licenses needed for individual viewing of commercial videos. Patients in hospitals, nursing homes or hospices are considered at a temporary home viewing a video on a VCR that is intended for individual use. Individual viewing is considered private viewing. That's why the Comedy Carts VCRs are small. They are for individual viewing. When you wheel a video cart to a patient's bed that is individual viewing which is in a temporary home location. That's how the video carts are legal.

An in-house TV channel is not considered individual viewing. When a hospital has a channel on their hospital TVs that's when it becomes public broadcasting even if it is only in the confines of the hospital. Then you need a license to view a commercial video. Viewing a commercial video in a public area as in a clinic or waiting room is also considered public viewing -- viewing by a group.

This copyright law is continually broken in the private sector. By law it is illegal to show a video to a church group or the neighborhood kids in your recreation room. This is not individual viewing. It becomes a larger legal issue when you deal with a large health corporation like a hospital.

There are firms that handle this kind of licensing for hospitals at a reasonable cost. They are priced by the number of beds in the hospital. For example Swank Health has a Comic Package with 14 tapes each with an episode of: I Love Lucy Show; the Honeymooners; and Abbott and Costello. This is what Rochester General Hospital has on their Humor Channel through their Therapeutic Humor Program. Contact Jodi Alden at Swank Health Care Services 1800 950-4248. www.swankhealth.com. Another licensing agent that does umbrella licensing is The Motion Picture Licensing Corporation. 800/462-8855 www.mplc.com

(Continued from previous page)

Because of the mutual involvement of hospital staff, volunteer and clowns, the Comedy Connection has the support of the hospital administration. Morton Plant Hospital now has 20 video carts and an extensive 200 video collection. Many have been donated by the health care staff and Clearwater community. We have three dedicated rooms: two to store the carts; one as a true Clown Alley

Enter the Clowns

This section is a composite of information from Leslie Gibson and her two clown alley leaders: Dale "Tootsie Pop" Piskie and Jean "Daffodil" McNath.

The clowns came after the pilot cart was developed. While teaching a class "The Power of Applied Humor" a clown attending Ray Teasdale (pictured on cover) asked, "I want to do what you do!" I responded "Have you ever lectured on Humor and Health?" He responded "I've only taught clown classes." I saw the light and eagerly responded "Can you teach me to be a Clown?"

The first clown class was at a local church in 1988 with eight graduating clowns. Our first Clown College at Morton Plant was 1989. The clown troupe now has 100 members on the roll with 60 being active. They can offer Morton Plant Mease 5 clowns a day. There are a variety of responsibilities and commitments to suit their different needs. The clowns don't necessarily need to deliver the cart or they can take a cart, and not clown. Almost every day at the larger hospitals there are four from the Comedy Connection. Usually two of them are clowns.



From the left Joan "Shamrock" Barry, Dale "Tootsie Pop" Piskie, Nancy "Bogey" Hannas and Jean "Daffodil" Mc Nab.

We ask for a 24 notice from the hospital for special events like birthdays. We even have an emergency plan. We have spare clown costumes in the clown room in case of an emergency situation. For example: Cookie got a call from ICU. There was a patient dying, an older man, who had his family there. They didn't know what to do with the children. The hospital begged for a clown, so Cookie was in the hospital at that time in "civies." She went to the clown room, put on makeup and one of those costumes. She spent several hours with the children while the family sat with the dying man. You may not think of it, but there truly are clown emergencies.

Clown Schedule

We have a day program with the carts and the videos from 12 to 4 in the afternoon and a program nights and weekends for the clowns who work full time. They come in by 6 p.m. and clown for about 2 hours. We have 2 to 6 clowns a night. Usually they will all come on a floor and then go into rooms individually. Afterwards they all go into the clown room and pop corn and sit around sharing their experiences. There is a really nice group experience going on there.

Morton Plant Mease Clown Alley

We are a World Clown Association Alley and follow their guidelines; however, our alley is not just about competition. We teach "the more loving approach" -- the personal level. We do skits, but we also do a lot of one-on-one clown work. We try to encourage everyone. Everyone has something different to offer, and they also have difficulty with different things.

Our Clown College has a Fall and a January class each with 15 - 20 students. We just graduated our 21st class! The course is for ten weeks, one night a week, for three hours. We charge \$85 for the ten weeks. Ten weeks of teaching is too much for anyone, so we have different speakers come in for some of the classes. Our instructors are paid, although all the clowns do their hospital work as volunteers.

During the course of study, we do two nights in the hospital as clown rounds. After they have learned to do makeup and have their costumes we get photos done for the hospital ID.

Graduation is a big celebration where they are participate in skits (for family and friends) and they get a diploma and their ID badges at graduation.



The Comedy Connection

at Morton Plant Mease Health Care

A Clown loves and serves. Use clowns to support patients. Never use patient support as a n opportunity to clown.

Leslie Gibson

Laughter The Universal Language

Pal Joey Program .

We encourage a team approach, so after graduation a clown has what we call a *Pal Joey*. An established clown will mentor a new clown for a whole year. For the first month they clown together. Then their *Pal Joey* is like their sponsor -- someone they can get help from and talk to about their experiences.

Do you get a lot of people who take the clown class and then don't volunteer in the hospital?

We let volunteers know right up front that this is not a course for birthday party clowns. We do ask that they volunteer 4 hours a month. Of course, we can't enforce that as we are a volunteer program. We try to be very careful in screening the clowns. We don't want to have people really use us to learn a commercial skill.

Our clowns also sign a Conflict of Interest Agreement:

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AGREEMENT FOR MORTON PLANT MEASE CLOWNS

I understand, that if I am clowning on behalf of Morton Plant Mease Health Care, I WILL:

Go through the Auxiliary orientation and complete the training checklist.

Always wear my MPM name tag

NEVER accept money or tips from anyone (donations can be directed to the Auxiliary)

Sign-in and out on Axillary time sheets to include one-hour for at home make-up application , if applicable)

Observe hospital visiting hours at all times.

Have fun!

I understand, that if I am engaged in PRIVATE clowning (not on behalf of Morton Plant Mease Health Care), I WILL:

NOT wear my hospital name badge

Carry my own Professional clown insurance.

NOT give away any stickers or promotional items purchased by the hospital/auxiliary

Make my own contractual arrangements for any financial fees.

NOT recorded volunteer hours

NOT represent Morton Plant Mease Health Care in any fashion during the event.

We have an extensive Application Form that helps us. We ask: Do you work with kids? Are you retired? What are your hobbies? Why do you want to be a clown? If they say they want to do birthday parties, it's a red flag right there. If they work full time and have a two year old, that's another red flag.

There are a lot of people here in Florida who are looking to give back to the community in some way. Clowning does it. We have a lot of *Snowbirds* (people who come to Florida just in the winter) that love to clown with us. So we have more clowns in the winter months than in the summer.

We also have many clowns who are employed full time. They go into the hospital at night and on weekends.

Serving the Whole Community

Besides the clowns and the carts, we realized the need for outreach programs. We're not just there for the patients, which is our main influence, but for the hospital support groups too. Leslie does a lot of the teaching of the benefits of Health and humor including groups as Mended Hearts, and many of us do school programs. For example, we go to schools when children are getting their shots. We also do Health Fairs and Community parades.

The more we can get the word out, the more we can reach out to other hospitals. The Outreach Programs are actually very good for recruiting clowns.

The Comedy Connection Grows

We needed to come up with the name that would cover all the aspects of the group, so we did a name contest to combine the clowns and the cart, the fairs, parades, and the outreach programs. Again it was a way of involving everyone! We were looking for an umbrella for our services, and the winner of the contest was *The Comedy Connection*

We started with one wing of the hospital, and soon other wings heard about us. "Oh, we can have clowns, we can have videos we can have games?" Other wings wanted some! We grew so fast that the Director of Education said we had to take it to volunteer services. So that is why we report to the Auxiliary.

In 1990 The Morton Plant Hospital merged with the Mease Hospital who had their own clown group and that's when we really expanded. The Marketing Department at Mease Hospital used to hire their employees to dress as clowns to do parades. So when the hospitals merged, it was two different clown cultures merging. This meant that hospital employees would not be getting paid to clown. However, after the merger we invited the Mease clowns to join our clown alley, and that seemed to work for everyone.

There are seven hospitals in this new health care system. We have Comedy Connection programs in four of the seven. We've applied for funding from the hospital foundations. In order to get funding you have to show how many customers have been served. So we have carried little hand counters in our pockets that the clowns click off as they make their rounds. In 2001 we had over 7,000 cart visits to patients and 12, 000 clown visits. When hospitals see these kind of numbers they pay attention.

Leslie remarks: The saddest thing I've seen over the last fifteen years is the hospitals getting the funding, having the space, and no one to get the program going. Even though I got the program going I feel the success of our program is that we have over 100 volunteers that are so excited to be able to go and cheer up patients We have shared that responsibility, so that no one person has to carry the whole load. That's really where our program has benefitted. We have gone through a lot of different changes and instructors, and we learned from all our differences.

Several years ago Leslie started working as community liaison with the Hospice of The Florida Suncoast. And being true to her faith in the power of laughter she created a therapeutic humor program at the hospice. The Smile Team, which is the Clown group, has been in operation for a year with 20 active members. The clowns are trained with the Morton Plant Mease Clowns and just recently there has been a mutual collaboration between The hospice and the hospital which will allow both groups to function under The Comedy Connection.

The article below is reprinted in part from Vital Signs: a Florida Nursing Journal.

Good Grief: Moving from Grief to Comic Relief

Excerpts form Vital Signs Mag. Vol XII, No.12, June 25, 2002

By Leslie Gibson-Johnson

*A Time to Cry
and a time to laugh
A time to grieve
and a time to dance.*

Ecclesiastes3:4

As a part of our hospice's Palliative Arts Program, we are offering patients and families a variety of creative techniques, such as aroma therapy, massage therapy, music, art and guess what — humor therapy. To help provide comic relief, we formed The Hospice Smile Team, which includes clowns, volunteers and staff who promote laughter techniques in a variety of settings. Learning to laugh again helps us survive and re-enter life. One of the first signs of depression is the loss of our sense of humor.

The words humor and hospice do not seem to fit like a hand into a glove. Even famous comedians admitted that after 9-11, they lost their desire to be funny. The late Steve Allen, who wrote dozens of books on how to be funny, shared a formula. "Tragedy plus Time = Comedy." To reinforce this, note that one of the most frequently requested parts of a funeral service by families who have lost loved ones is, "Make sure you talk about his/her sense of humor."

My grandmother lived to be 99. She was a very proper Bostonian lady with a well developed sense of humor. My favorite memory of her was a true story that occurred when she was interviewed by a reporter doing a story on "longevity." She lived alone in her apartment until she was 96 years of age. The reporter asked her if she used any assistive devices, such as a walker or a cane. She said, "No, I can walk perfectly fine on my own." Then he asked her if she took any medication for a bad heart or lungs. She said, "No, I do not take any medications at all." Then, he slumped in his chair and said to my grandmother, "It's amazing that a woman of your age isn't bedridden!" Well, he said the wrong words to my grandmother. She straightened right up and said to the reporter, "I never said THAT. Honey, I have been bedridden many times and twice in a buggy." Needless to say, her quick wit put him into his place. We all laughed, and he included that comment in his article.

Our sense of humor has no age limits, no cultural barriers, and is a universal skill to provide stress relief.

Researchers currently are exploring the physical effects of humor, and I will summarize a few of the benefits from laughter. When we chuckle or laugh out loud, we provide exercise to the lungs. If you remember laughing to the point of tears, you have actually triggered a release valve eliminating stress and toxins from your body.

Additional physical benefits from laughing include increasing blood circulation, clearing bronchial secretions, boosting the immune system, and as the late Norman Cousins described, providing "INTERNAL JOGGING."

There are a few areas that need to be approached with caution. For example, some individuals with asthma need to laugh at their own pace. Those who suffer from incontinence should wear appropriate protective garments — but don't stop laughing, because the exercise is good for both your body and your mind.

Our Hospice Smile Team has sponsored several activities for our staff, such as giving every department team member a red sponge nose celebrating April as National Humor Month. One of our vice presidents sends weekly funny e-mail messages and promotes cartoons on bulletin boards. Our volunteers stuff 30 jokes and riddles into real prescription bottles that we give to doctors, nurses, support groups and patients. The Rx label says: "Laughter Is The Best Medicine" — take as needed.

Dr. Riddle A Day

Once, after providing a lecture on humor for a cancer support group where everyone received a prescription bottle, the director of the Cancer Center called me the following day. She shared not only her delight with the positive attitudes from the participants but said, "I wish you could see our waiting room right now! The patients and families came with the prescription bottles and are reading the jokes to the others who missed the support group — and everyone is laughing!" Just think about this for a minute — people do not generally laugh in a doctor's waiting room, especially when going for cancer treatments.

Over the last 15 years of promoting humor in health-care settings, the wonderful stories continue to refuel my heart and soul. However, I have just returned from presenting this topic at The Humor Project's International Conference in Saratoga Springs, NY. With a large audience, we did not have enough time for people to do an introduction, as I would suggest for small support group activities. One of the participants won an Rx bottle for sharing a funny moment. After the session was over, he and several others came to share their stories with me. When this young man approached me, he gave me the most embracing hug I have ever had, and told me that he could not thank me enough for helping him rediscover his sense of humor. He is a surviving New York City fireman who lost most of his friends and co-workers during 9-11. He showed me a smile face button that had blood drops dripping from it because they had lost their ability to laugh. He said he was anxious to take the information on the healing power of humor back to his fire station. When you can help even one person smile or learn to laugh again — it is the GREATEST GIFT you can ever provide.

By moving through the grief process, the journey will take you from moping to coping, and to hoping. My challenge to you is to try smiling or laughing with at least three people each day. Ask families to share their funniest memories and live, love and laugh together. My dad sent me this little message a month before he collapsed and died from a massive stroke.

His note said, "Honey, I thought you might be able to use this message in one of your motivational lectures."

"Yesterday is history,
Tomorrow is a mystery,
Today is a gift.....
That's why we call it the present."

– Leslie Gibson

One of their Do's of Therapeutic clowning is: *Always wear some type of comedy underwear: you never know when you may drop your pants.* These clowns have a lot of fun. And this is one of the things that keep them going. They have fun! They are a community!

*We are each of us an angel with one wing
and we can only fly by embracing each other.*

“ Free Tours are always welcome for anyone visiting the Tampa Bay area, because our volunteers love visitors!”

Geriatric Gigglers

by Leslie Gibson

Reprinted from Vital Signs, January 20, 1998

Growing older is not easily accepted by many people. But most of us learn to accept the physical changes associated with aging.

In the Medicare home health care field I have had a wonderful opportunity to work with the geriatric generation. From my observation, it seems that the more developed the sense of humor in the elderly, the more graceful the acceptance of the physical change and deterioration associated with aging. Many elderly who become ill or lose vital functions – such as sight, hearing, or taste – become very depressed. Depression often leads to further isolation as people feel sorry for themselves.

Therapeutic humor techniques are often the only positive stimuli we can offer the elderly. I have frequently used the local library's audio cassette resources and lent my headphones to patients. Favorites of the current geriatric generation include Burns and Allen and Abbott and Costello. Humorous diversion will take one's mind off negative conditions and allow the biological endorphins to reduce physical and emotional pain.

I really leave a patient's home without passing on a funny story or requesting a story. It's an easy duty – writing down a couple of G or PG rated stories which can be reused for the patients that week. Like wise, assigning a similar task for the patient is relatively undemanding and stimulates the patient in many positive ways.

Patients who are confined to bed are asked to make a cassette tape of their favorite personal stories.

STORY BOOKS: In previous newsletters, I have written how some family members have had their elderly parents write a story book and how nursing homes have published a story book and even story book newsletters. As we get older we want to pass our wisdom to others. It is a way of recognizing the meaning of life and the contributions we have made to this life. It is about seeing the glass half full and not half empty. A little shift in attitude can mean all the happiness in the world to our elderly populations, giving the comfort of having made a difference.

– Shobi



The Smile Team's Vision:

*To bring a smile,
a chuckle
and moments of levity
to all those affected
by death.*

This group of clowns just celebrated a year of service. They are OK and Clyde, Starry Light, Jubilee, Sprout, Sunbeam and Ting

Joye Swisher "Ting" (the current Chairperson) reported: "One of my favorite moments was the time I visited an elderly lady in the nursing home," said, "I walked up in full costume and said "Gee, your awfully pretty," and she said "Thank you" A few minutes later the staff who was with her told me they couldn't believe what just happened because this patient, having had a stroke, had not talked for three months."

This is not an unfamiliar experience to any one of us who have been clowning in hospitals. This is one very energetic team of clowns which numbers around 20 active members. Last year they clowned at: Hospice House Woodside, Menorah Manor, The Berrington, Manor Care, Suncoast Hospital Project, Children's Hope (for children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS), Festival of Trees and The Elks Club holiday party.

The team also appeared at churches, the Hospice Thrift Shop grand opening, the American Cancer Society's Relay for life, All Children's Hospital, private homes, events for ASAP (AIDS Services Association of Pinellas, Inc.) And many other presentations.

The Team also presents programs at: the Florida Hospices and Palliative Care Inc.'s 17th annual symposium in Orlando; and at the Kaleidoscope of Caring at the Palliative Arts Conference.

They host fund-raisers for the money necessary to pay for Smile Team's clown supplies: props, balloons, face paints, and stickers. The Smile Team's 10 week schedule of classes include makeup and costuming, character development, therapeutic clown methods, and skits (which they perform in full face at graduation).