



# ...The Hygiene Mind Set

## SARS and The Hygiene Mind Set

No longer is it one nation's problem. The world has become "the global village" and many of us clowns have become globe trotters! The *Hygiene Mind Set* is important for every clown whether you work in a hospital, nursing home - and everywhere in community and world service.

WHO (World Health Organization) says SARS, a respiratory infection caused by a relative of a common cold virus, is spread by droplets from sneezing and coughing. It may also be transmitted if people touch objects such as elevator buttons and then touch their faces, and SARS was found to have contaminated the sewers in a Hong Kong Apartment complex.

Patch Adam's trip to China and Tibet this month (May) was cancelled due to the epidemic in China.

### SARS Shows Critical Need For Personal/Public Hygiene

These are the headlines today. TV newscasts are full of SARS news everyday and show the tremendous efforts the Chinese are taking to try and contain the disease.

### *The Serious Responsible Person Behind the Red Nose*

This all sounds pretty scary especially with the SARS epidemic, but this *Hygiene Mind Set* is not new. With the new disease comes an epidemic of fear. The balance here to fear for everyone (staff, patient and clown) is knowledge! Get informed, let hospital staff know you are informed and stay alert.

More than any time in our short history, hospital clowns will be watched closely. Already some clowns have been asked not to come in until the epidemic is over. Hospital Staff needs to become aware that we are as capable and as conscientious as any clinical staff. Just because we act like kids, play around and dress silly, doesn't mean there isn't a serious responsible person behind the Red Nose.

### *Necessary Discipline and Discretion*

Caution and a good deal of conscious self discipline and discretion is necessary for the *Hygiene Mind Set*. Hospital staff may not have the time to notice or supervise our use of puppets, props or face painting in the hospital environment. Using any puppets and/or props inside a patients room or in contact with any patient must be done with great discretion - this often means to "wisely" judge a situation on your own.. The more we learn about the hospital the better prepared we will be to make these educated decisions. It is my experience that in the moment it is up to the clown to know the hospital protocol and to always abide by the hospital standards. When in any doubt ask a staff member and if they are busy don't use the prop.

CLOWNS probably see more patients in a day than a single nurse or doctor. A nurse will have 5-6 patients. A clown can go into 25-30 patients' rooms see 350 people a day! Besides that we go from ICU to Pediatrics to Hospice to lobbies to Oncology to waiting rooms. We cannot only spread pathogens from patient to patient, we could get the infection ourselves.

**It is vital that we as clowns keep a *Hygiene Mind Set* for our own protection too!**

SARS as of this writing does not have a known cure. But there have been germs and infections in the hospital for some time that are resistant to known antibiotics. MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) is a hospital acquired infection. Methicillin is a broad spectrum antibiotic used only when other antibiotics are not effective. Community acquired MRSA is an aggressive skin "supergerm" which, if it gets into the blood, can cause deadly complications. It can enter the body through a small paper cut. Washing your hands is the best prevention for control of these germs.

Not too long ago I was sitting with a nurse-clown friend having lunch (we had just come down from clowning in ICU) I looked at her, "Did you wash your hands?" "No" "Did you?" "No" Not good! There we were, eating a sandwich with our bare hands after coming off the ICU floor. Yes, we know better. We got caught up in the moment of clowning because that's what we do as clowns. We forgot our *Hygiene Mind Set*!

It appears SARS is deadliest in people over 60 and people with compromised and low immune systems. This is another reason to take care of your health. We never clown in the hospital when we are sick. Not just because we don't want to spread our problems to others, but because our immune systems are low and we are vulnerable to infection and disease.

There are lots of immune booster products out on the market. I have been traveling for years with Echinacea Root extract, Airborne, and an individual air purifier which I wear around my neck on the airplane. And I get plenty of good food and SLEEP. Exhaustion can lower your immune system too. The last time Shobi was sick was in China in 2000, probably because of air pollution in Beijing, an exhausting clown schedule, and travel sleep interruption. 40 of the 44 clowns on the trip got respiratory infections. I believe, however, that my recent good health has a lot to do with the habits of personal hygiene I have developed as a hospital clown. I have the habit of washing my hands like all the clinical personnel in the hospital. And we hospital clowns are clinical personnel as we deal directly with the public and with patients.

***Hand Washing Is the Single Most Important Means of Preventing the Spread of Infection.***



## ***This Is How We Wash Our Hands in the Hospital***

Pull up your sleeves. Use the antibacterial soap and rub your hands vigorously under running water getting the wrists and between the fingers. It is the friction of rubbing the hands that is important. Nurses are taught in school to wash hands for a ten-second slow count under running water. (We clowns sing a stanza of *Happy Birthday or Row Your Boat*) Rinse hands well to remove excess soap and to prevent skin irritation. This removes most transient flora (germs). Immediate re-contamination of washed hands can be avoided by turning off faucets with a paper towel or use foot pedals. And watch out for those door handles!

### ***Instant Hand Sanitizers***

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers significantly reduce the number of germs on the skin, are fast acting, and cause less skin irritation than frequent soap and water hand washing. They do not work as well when there is visible dirt on the skin, because they do not release and rinse away dirt as with soap and water washing.

Apply the product to the palm of one hand and rub the hands together vigorously, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers, until hands are dry.

#### **Products must contain at least 60% ethyl alcohol.**

PURELL® is the most popular brand and used a lot in health care facilities. Again it is important to rub the hands vigorously. According to Purell explanation, it is the friction of rubbing the hands that loosens the germs, even when using soap. The sanitizers are easy to carry, and easy to remember to use. I have a hand pump container on top of my cart behind Mona. It dries in 15 seconds and they now even make it with Aloe Vera.

However, alcohol hand sanitizers are not substitutes for washing hands. Remember, the labels read it reads “clinically proven to kill 99.9% of most common disease-causing germs within 15 seconds without water or towels.” The hospital is not a common place with common germs.

**Long fingernails** or artificial nails make hand hygiene difficult to achieve. For these persons extra attention to scrubbing underneath fingernails is required to remove dirt and germs. Health care or patient care workers are discouraged from having long fingernails, because they work with patients who are at high risk for infection and failure to assure proper hand hygiene could be dangerous.

**Gloves** can be a helpful and important supplement to good hygiene. Although gloves can protect the hands against contamination, they do not always prevent hand contamination. For this reason, gloves do not eliminate the need for hand hygiene. Hand hygiene should always occur before and after contact with patients i.e., wash hands before and after using gloves. Wearing gloves is not a substitute for hand washing. **DO** get in the habit of **NOT** putting your fingers in your mouth or rubbing your eyes. Wash your hands before you eat.

**COVER** any open wounds (this include torn cuticles and scratches) with bandages or liquid bandage. This prevents infection by bacteria, some of which can be antibiotic resistant. If you come into contact with any body fluids tell a medical professional immediately.

**NEVER** let anyone cough on you - immediately stand up and move out of their range. Be especially careful in waiting rooms.

Not just SARS, but tuberculosis is in epidemic proportions and on the rise everywhere in the world. Some forms of TB do not have a cure! Hospitalized TB patients are generally in atmospheric isolation (negative pressure) so the air from their rooms does not mix with the rest of the hospital. Special training programs are provided to hospital employees treating TB patients. But in the public lobbies, waiting rooms and Emergency Room, TB may not have been detected, so be careful, and as always, be aware you are working in a potentially dangerous arena.

**Be Aware of the Floor.** The hospital floor is the most contagious germ breeding place in the hospital. (That is why they are constantly washing it.) NEVER use anything that falls on the floor until it is properly washed. Be careful about putting your clown bags on the floor and then on a patient’s bed or a chair. It is best to use a cart on wheels to carry your supplies.

**Be Aware of all PPE Advisories** PPE is Personal Protection Equipment. This is used in isolation rooms.

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## **Use of Puppets in the Hospital Environment**

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We need to practice hygiene protocol at all times, and with puppets this can be tricky. Puppets are a great ice breaker and actually can facilitate conversations with patients that a clown cannot. But we always need to be aware of infection control. Remember that all fuzzy puppets are potential germ carriers.

### ***Public Area Puppets***

Most of the puppets I use in the hospital I call “*Public Area Puppets.*” In other words they are used in areas that allow the public to enter, i.e., the hospital is not in control of the infection control. However, we still need to be aware of people sneezing, coughing or otherwise contaminating our puppets. It’s for our own safety as well as patients and clients in a health care facility.

We have to be conscious of the patient, their illness and possible germ contamination. If someone sneezes on the puppet and you then take the puppet into a room of a chemo patient whose immune system is compromised, you could cause them a great deal of harm.

If I do use a puppet in a room, I don’t touch the patients. Mona who rides on my hospital cart never leaves her cart. She complains a lot about that, but will tell you how she fell off once going across the street and “That’s why I wear a seat belt now”. Actually it was a pretty funny scene in front of the hospital - Shobi holding up traffic while saying “Oh, I’m so sorry. Please, Mona don’t sue me” and giving her CPR on the street. People actually stopped to help me put her back together.)

Most of my puppets including Pooky, my shaggy sheep dog, I wash in soap and water. Pooky can go in the washing machine, but not the dryer. Extreme heat may kill germs, but it will also kill your puppet. The artificial hair will melt. I’ve already done this experiment!

Actually, germs need a warm wet environment in which to survive. If you wipe off your puppets and set them in a dry place, in 24 hours most germs will not survive. If spores from coughing and sneezing are on the puppet, they can live in sputum or body fluids. These need to be washed off the puppet. It is a good idea, even on your *public area puppets*, to wipe them off after every visit to a hospital or nursing home and/or spray them with a disinfectant spray. Try getting your hospital to give you a can of their disinfectant spray. It will be more powerful than over the counter sprays, and you will be in compliance.

My Minnie white rabbit in the hat wears surgical glove finger tips as gloves. She even puts them on. At my hospital we don't use latex anymore but another type of surgical glove that they supply me. I never take my *Huggy Bear* to a hospital because people cannot resist hugging her - especially children. So *Huggy Bear* only goes on ambassador trips to public areas.

### Some Common Questions:

*Do we wash our hands when coming onto a floor?* We have to be careful about even going from clinics to rooms. In clinics people have just come off the street and we don't know their condition. It is best to wash your hands when coming on a new floor.

*Do I need to wash my props if a patient touches them?* Yes. Try to use props that can be wiped with alcohol swabs.

*Is Dryel (dry cleaning in the dryer) a good way to disinfect fuzzy puppets?* No. Dryel steams the clothes and puts in a fragrance. The only disinfecting agent here is the heat and they recommend a low setting which is not hot enough to kill germs.

I asked Proctor and Gamble USA Dryel Team: Here is their reply. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but we don't make any germ killing claims for Dryel. Nor do we have any other product that could be used on stuffed animals to kill germs. I'm sharing your interest in such a thing with the rest of the Dryel Team."

### Talk to Staff, Ask Questions

Most at-risk patients are immuno-compromised patients: new borns and patients in Intensive Care Units. Ask staff if there are immuno-compromised patients. Those on chemo therapy are very often among these patients. The immune system is low and they are more susceptible to infection. Be especially aware of their needs.

Don't get caught with germs on your hands. If you are unclear as to a place, a situation or a prop and hygiene, ask a hospital staff member. Let staff know that you are very mindful of hygiene and are very conscientious about your responsibility in the hospital. The more we ask, the more respect and trust we will get from hospital and medical center staff.

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## Face Painting and Hygiene

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The following guidelines are for face painting in hospitals. We have printed this before, but it is worth a reprint. I've had people tell me that at a convention a hospital clown said they put a few drops of alcohol in their water (this does nothing as you will see from reading this). Some other teacher told them to use Q tips. Sure, but what about contaminating the paint? These guidelines sound complicated and take some time to prepare, but the rewards of face painting in the hospital are wonderful. You need to go over this with your infection control people, to let them know you are aware of infection control. These have been approved by my hospital.

Using products that come in tubes allows the paint to remain closed and unexposed to pathogens. I wipe off the tips with an anti-bacteria wipe after squeezing out paint/water/glitter/lotion.

- ✓ Always check with a nurse before face painting.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ If the child's skin is quite dry or on very young skin, the color can penetrate the skin. Use a little cream or lotion (from a tube again for infection control) on the child's face first. Some face painting companies (as Grimis from Holland) sell special creams for this purpose.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Use water soluble paint that comes in tubes (Kryolan and Mehron). 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. The idea is not to go from face to paint to face to another face. Get the idea? The traveling germs.
- ✓ 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. Graffiti Glitter (Jerome Russell) in little bottles squeeze out a small portion and are handled the same way as tube paint.
- ✓ Use a clean palette for each patient to mix your colors. You can use a sketch pad or cut up paper plates that you've put into plastic bags.
- ✓ Use disposable makeup applicators or cotton swabs to apply the paint. Really cheap swabs are best as they don't have a lot of cotton on them. I also use sponges to apply and shade paint. I get 1 inch chair foam from the craft store and cut it into 1 inch pieces. Use a new clean sponge for each patient and store other new ones in a plastic bag.
- ✓ 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. Clean it off in fresh water.
- ✓ At the end of the day, wash all your used brushes in hot water with a soap that contains an antimicrobial agent 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 nor will using a little alcohol in your wash water.
- ✓ Shobi sets a timer and watches the news on TV while she swirls her 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 face painting jobs, I have a separate face painting box for the hospital. It's just a small pencil box and contains a mirror which I can wash with an alcohol wipe, plus a small sketch book for a palette, and brushes/Q-tips/makeup applicators in plastic bags. The box also contains some alcohol wipes and tattoos. I use hospital paper cups for water. Once the case is set up the hygiene is easy.