

# Hospital Clown Newsletter

A Publication for Clowns in Community and World Service

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## Theodora Children's Trust



Clockwise from bottom center: *Dr. LooLoo (Lucy Cheetham)*; *Dr. Geehee (Faith Tingle)*; *Dr. Kala (Annie Aris)*; *Dr. Mattie (Matthew Faint)*, *Dr. Ding Dong (Clare Parry- Jones)*; *Dr. Doppit (Hilary Day)*; *Dr. Kiku (Colin Maher)*; to his right *Dr. D. Chequers (Barrington Powell)* and to his left *Dr. Strumalong (Patrick Jacobs)*

The Swiss-based *Fondation Théodora* has 105 clowns in 85 hospitals in 9 countries. In this newsletter we meet the nine UK clowns of *Theodora Children's Trust*, a London-based charity, and their dynamic executive director, Joanie Speers. They come to clowning from the fields of theater, education and drama therapy,

and like many of us, they come to the hospital because they have a strong conviction to give something back to their communities. So popular are the clown doctors at one London hospital that young patients now call it the "clown hospital."

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The Fondation Théodora (Theodora Foundation) was founded by Jan and Andre Poulie in memory of their mother, Théodora in Switzerland in 1993. The Foundation is committed to making the clown doctor program available to hospitalized children around the world.

### **Mission:**

The Theodora Foundation has set itself the mission of making life better for children in hospital or in specialist institutions. This they can do thanks to an activity which is artistic, playful, imaginative and amusing and which knows no borders, be they geographical, religious or racial.

UBS Financial Services Group was a partner of the Foundation from 1995 through 2003. Thanks to their support the Foundation was able to expand to 8 other countries. Today they have 105 clowns in 85 hospitals in 9 countries

In Switzerland the Foundation is active every week in 39 hospitals with 30 clowns visiting over 55,000 young patients per year.

The United Kingdom (1994) has 9 clown doctors in 8 hospitals, which we cover in this issue of the newsletter

Belarus (1994) has 3 clown doctors in 3 hospitals

Italy (1995) has 14 clown doctors in 11 hospitals

South Africa (1995) has 5 clown doctors in 2 hospitals

Hong Kong (1996) has 5 clown doctors in 5 hospitals

Turkey (1998) has 5 clown doctors in 3 hospitals

Spain (1999) has 12 clown doctors in 8 hospitals

France (2000) has 22 clown doctors in 6 hospitals

In addition to weekly visits to hospitals and clinics - preferably to the same one in order to build up a close relationship with longer term patients, the clown doctors also attend regular seminars on hospital procedures, hygiene, psychology, child psychiatry and other pertinent health related subjects. Once a year 105 Theodora clown doctors from all nine countries attend a four-day seminar in Switzerland. All the clowns are paid per diem and most work two days a week.

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In the UK, the Theodora Foundation has been active since April 1994. In 1996 Theodora Children's Trust was officially registered as a charity and in 2003 became a charitable company no. 1094532.

I was to have visited the Trust the week after my workshops at the CI (Clowns International) Clown Festival in Bolton, England in 2001. That would have been the week after 9/11. Shobi was in Bolton on 9/11/01. Actually two of the clown doctors interviewed in this newsletter (Barrington Powell and Lucy Cheetham) were in my workshop when they made the announcement about the Twin Towers in NYC. It has taken me a couple of years to get back there. This time I went before the CI Clown Festival which was in Weston-Super-Mare. I was able to meet and visit the program for several days in London.

With the exception of Colin Maher, the dialogues on the following pages were done by interviewing the clowns on the telephone. Shobi appreciates all the time in the past four weeks these wonderful and compassionate clowns have given her and therefore the readers of this newsletter. A special thanks to Joanie Speers, Executive Director of the Trust (see page 5) for her help.

[Reprinted with permission from Theodora Children's Trust]



**The Mission** of Theodora Children's Trust is to bring laughter and fun to children in hospital.

**The Aim** of the Trust is to offer children in hospital in the UK weekly visits from specially trained Theodora clown doctors.

**The Objectives** of the Trust are:

- To have a positive effect on sick children in hospital and their families
- To collaborate with hospital staff and to complement their work
- To run a clown doctor training program in partnership with a medical school
- For this training program to be recognized by UK health authorities for its professional standards and specialized role
- For hospitals in the UK to sign up to the clown doctor program through the Trust

### **The Program**

The children's hospitals involved in the Theodora Children's Trust program receive weekly visits from clown doctors. The clowns begin with an impromptu session in the outpatients department and then move on to the wards, where they are briefed by the nurses on the condition of those children who would benefit most from a visit. They then wait to be invited by the child before proceeding. The clown doctors use their improvisation and entertainment skills to involve each patient as much as possible, ensuring that the child is not confined to the role of spectator but can participate in the magic and the activities. With tact and sensitivity, the clown doctors also involve the families and the medical staff.

## ***Selection Process:***

Mastery of improvisation and entertainment techniques are the basis for eligibility to be a clown doctor. Among the essential qualities for this work are an ability to listen, sensitivity, emotional stability, dedication and professionalism. The selection process includes application form, interview, and continuous assessment. There is no guarantee that once chosen as a clown doctor trainee, the candidate will become a fully trained Theodora clown doctor.

## ***The Training***

A complete training program, which all candidates are required to undergo, is run in partnership with **King's College London**.

The training includes medical and artistic workshops. Medical knowledge/awareness covers hospital procedures, infection control, a range of physical and psychological illnesses, and the structure of hospital pediatric services.

It is important to know how to approach a sick child, and also involve the family and hospital staff without being intrusive. The candidates will already have many artistic skills such as magic, acting, story-telling, mime, balloon sculpture, and juggling. They learn to develop these skills and adapt them to each child's need in widely differing situations. 16 workshop sessions are given as follows.

**Medical Awareness** includes:

- Hospital structure/rules/regulations
- Hospital hygiene
- Personal hygiene
- Well child development
- Sick child development
- Impact of long term/terminal illness on the child and its family
- Pain management
- Death of a child and how to manage this

**Artistic Development** includes:

- Purpose of clown doctors/their responsibilities
- Hospital situations
- Approaching and leaving a child
- Child protection issues
- Codes of conduct/ethics
- Development of clown doctor character and attitudes
- Dealing with emotions.

A minimum of 16 hospital visits - 4 observing out of costume; 12 in costume as an assistant to an experienced clown doctor.

## ***On-Going Training and Assessment***

All qualified clown doctors participate in on-going training and assessment throughout the year with doctors, nurses and psychologists. Police checks are also carried out before the clowns begin their work with the Trust.

- In the first year after the formal training, as junior clown doctors, 3 thorough observations are made by the trainer.
- From then on, as clown doctors, observations take place once a year.
- Participation in three 2-day workshops a year on both medical and artistic topics.
- Annual assessment with the executive director of the charity.

## ***The Funding***

The funds raised from trusts, foundations and corporate partners and donations made by the general public, pay for the clown doctors' visits, props and their recruitment and training. Since mid 2000, the Trust has received grants or support from a wide range of sources, including USB, King's Fund, Bridge House Trust, John S. Cohen Foundation, Woodward Charitable Trust, 29th May 1961 Charity, Help a London Child, BBC Appeal, GlaxoSmithKline and BBC Children in Need.

We work in partnership with the following hospitals:

- Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, 1994
- Guy's & St. Thomas' Hospitals, London, 1996
- Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, July 2000
- Manchester Children's Hospitals (Pendlebury and Booth Hall), September 2001
- Southampton General Hospital, July 2002
- Royal Alexandra Hospital for Sick Children, Brighton, July 2002
- National Centre for Young People with Epilepsy, Lingfield, Surrey, November 2002.

The clown doctors all wear individually styled white doctor's coats which are made for them by the Theodora Foundation. These have huge pockets inside and out for props. You can see these below on *Dr. Geehee*, *Dr. Mattie* and *Dr. Strumalong* as they walk down a hospital corridor.



# Being Executive Director of Theodora Children's Trust



By Joanie Speers

I joined Theodora Children's Trust as the first director in April 2000. For the previous 4 years I had been development director for a journalism program for inner city kids called *Children's Express*. I was drawn to the Theodora job because there had been no "organisational" activity or development since the charity had been set up in 1996, and I was intrigued with the clown doctor work. I suppose having also had a very sick daughter at Gt Ormond Street Hospital made me more responsive to this sort of program.

The job is a mix of just about everything: fundraising, running events, press and publicity, developing relations with new hospitals and keeping on top of the relationships we have, overseeing the training (workshops and the recruitment and new training), networking, working with our board, working with the clown doctors - and it goes on.

Since 2000, we have become a seriously 3-dimensional being. We have grown from 2 experienced and 2 very new clown doctors working at 3 hospitals, to 9 phenomenal clown doctors working every week at 8 hospitals and every month at 1 special centre. The clown doctors are having an impact on 27,000 children and their families every year. We have grown from a board of trustees, no office and no staff, to me and an administrator and an office, and we have also become a charitable company limited by guarantee with a board of directors.

Now we are beginning to be noticed and to be seriously valued, in the hospital community and the community at large. There is a waiting list of 26 hospitals who want Theodora clown doctors to work with children in their care (and a waiting list of more than 50 applicants interested in becoming clown doctors). We are fulfilling the aims of the *National Service Framework for Children* by "normalising" the hospital environment and by reducing the stress and anxiety of being in hospital for children and their families. We are constantly being approached by other organisations to find out more about us and how we work, and who want to work with us.

The media is starting to take note as well, and we received our first award this year, *The Guardian Charity Awards 2003*, for "demonstrating innovative, pioneering work and making an outstanding contribution to social welfare in the community". And lately, we have been inundated with requests for stories for print, radio and TV. And not just the established press, but the student press as well.

But the best bit of all is working with a group of truly talented and dedicated clown doctors. The more I see, the more I am "knocked out" by what they do, how they do it, and how much they have all grown in their expertise over the last couple of years. I am constantly

humbled by their ingenuity, resourcefulness and humour. The real problem is that once I start talking about their work, it is almost impossible to get me to stop. (Just ask my family.)

The most frustrating and difficult part of my job is raising the money to keep us going as we are, and to get far enough ahead with this so that we can train more clown doctors to meet the demand. This is getting harder and harder, with 250,000 registered charities in the UK competing for the same funds at a time when the financial and corporate world seems to be tightening their spending belts. It may be difficult, but when I see the work we are doing and the joy we bring into the hospitals, it is so worth it!

**Theodora Children's Trust**

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**Pip** by Freya North. published by William Heinemann (Random House) August 2003. (To this date the book is not available in the USA) Freya North has written a series of romance novels for young people featuring young heroines. The heroine of this novel is a clown and a clown doctor named Pip. Freya North quite favorably portrays clown doctors. Her extensive research included shadowing *Dr. Mattie* in the hospital, and interviewing Joanie Speers



A young boy in Outpatient Clinic runs up to Dr. Kiku. They had met previously in a ward. "Dr. Kiku, can I touch your nose?" So the young boy touches the clown nose and Dr. Kiku's ears glow red. That's one of Dr. Kiku's trademarks - his blinkin' ears.