

# The Synergy of Smiles: Integrating Clinical Clowning and Nursing Care

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## Summary

*The innovative approach to holistic patient care, emphasises the importance of addressing not only the physical symptoms but also the emotional and social aspects of healing. Integration of humour and compassion underscores the role of nurses as holistic caregivers dedicated to enhancing the well-being of those they serve. This study aimed to unfold the significance of integrating clinical clowning in nursing as complimentary therapy promoting holistic healing and emotional well-being. Nursing clowning integration into patient care enhances the overall patient experience, promotes emotional wellness and cultivates a supportive healing environment for patients of all ages and backgrounds. Clinical clowning in nursing serves as a complimentary approach that enhances patient experience, improves outcomes and enhances the well-being of both patients and healthcare providers.*

**Key words:** Clinical clowning, Holistic patient care

Clinical Clowning in nursing is an innovative complimentary approach that combines humour, compassion, creativity and enhances patient care. It combines the art of clowning with selective medical and psychological training. Clowns are included in health care teams to help alleviate stress, loneliness, fear and feelings of helplessness in hospitalised patients (Finlay et al, 2014; Goldberg & Wiseman, 2014). Medical clowning is perceived to be a complementary approach which combines traditional medicine with various complementary and alternative medical techniques (Dionigi, 2017). Clinical clowns also called hospital clowns or clown doctors are trained professionals who aim to change the perception of the hospital environment by creating humouristic situations to elicit laughter and joy in paediatric wards as well as with adults and older adults (Dionigi et al, 2012; Dionigi & Goldberg, 2019; Friedler et al, 2017; Lalantika & Yuvaraj, 2020; Ofir et al, 2016). Many clown care units (CCUs) quickly emerged across the United States, with similar units also starting to appear concurrently in France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland, Austria, Canada, Australia, Brazil and Israel (Ford et al 2014).

“Therapeutic clowning” is an interdisciplinary art that involves a wide variety of

skills, such as humour, drama, music, and dance, aimed at providing a humour-based distraction to improve hospitalised paediatric patients’ moods and reduce their anxiety.

## Historical Background

Clowning is a kind of ancient art that produces an interaction between people, play and above all laughter. The role of medical clowns in hospital wards has gained increasing prominence in recent decades, though their presence in medical settings is far from a new development. Historical records show that clowns were active in healthcare as early as the early twentieth century. In the 1970s, Dr Patch Adams integrated clowning into the treatment of children in Virginia hospitals, gaining international recognition for pioneering new approaches and elevating medical clowning to a standard practice in paediatric care. By the 1980s, the first training programme for medical clowns was established, leading to the creation of similar programmes around the world (Lopez-Júnior et al, 2020).

## Purpose of Clinical Clowning in Nursing

The purpose is to explore the stories of therapeutic clowns in an effort to discover how clowns and clowning techniques could inform nursing practice. It also explores the phenomenon of interest - therapeutic clowns and developing a rich understanding of a phenomenon.

## Significance of Clinical Clowning

In general, clown doctors provide a complementary form of healthcare by using techniques such

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as music, juggling, improvisation, magic, storytelling, and puppetry to entertain children and teenagers in hospitals; they also visit adults in some hospitals. The clown doctors help create a positive emotional state and environment that promotes interaction between parents and child and foster a hopeful attitude. Clown doctors, with their remarkable adaptability, sensitivity and attentiveness, tailor their approach to each patient, situation, and medical procedure. Embracing the adage “laughter is the best medicine,” they harness the therapeutic power of humour to address the psychosocial needs of hospitalised patients, fostering emotional expression and empowerment. As hospital clowning continues to grow in many countries, studies on humour research, play research, and the physiological health benefits on laughter have also been conducted (Lopes-Junior et al, 2020). The medical clown reduces the physical and mental stress reactions of children, eases resistance during treatment, reduces post-operative pain, shortens crying time, and somewhat alleviates parents’ anxiety (Fang et al, 2022).

### **Research and Evidence Related to Health Care**

Pre-operative anxiety is very common among children and can result in negative consequences that may last for months afterward. Multiple randomised studies by various researchers have demonstrated that having clowns present in pre-operative settings helps reduce anxiety. A meta-analysis of these studies found that the presence of clowns before surgery significantly decreases children’s anxiety (Zhang et al, 2017). A 2015 study conducted in Israel involved children aged 2 to 16 undergoing outpatient urologic (penile) surgery. One group had a medical clown present in the operating room, while the other did not. The study found that the presence of the clown was associated with reduced anxiety in the children both before and after surgery, decreased operating room time, lower pain levels, and a shorter hospital discharge time. Additionally, cost savings were achieved due to the reduced time spent in both the operating room and post-operative unit (Kocherov et al, 2016).

### **Importance of Clinical Clowning**

To recapitulate, benefits of clown care include creating a positive emotional state, promoting interaction between the parents and the child and fostering affirmative environmental condition. When children seek medical treatment, caregivers show excessive anxiety and tension due to a lack of

disease-related knowledge and limited experience in providing care (Xiao-yan et al, 2023). Clown care translates professional medical knowledge into everyday language to enhance caregivers’ understanding of disease-related information and reduce their anxiety levels (Raisin et al, 2023; Xu et al, 2023).

### **Integration into Nursing Practice**

When dealing with patients, a clinical clown must blend artistic skills such as music, comedy, mime, magic, or puppetry that foster positive emotions, with personal qualities like empathy, emotional intelligence, and intuition. This combination allows clinical clowns to build therapeutic relationships with patients, helping to reduce pain and other negative effects of illness, while also enhancing their well-being and creating a more uplifting environment (Finlay et al, 2014).

### **Education Training Programmes**

Medical clowns are highly specialised, trained and qualified professionals. International scientific research has shown that medical clowning has a significant positive impact in improving mental, emotional and physical health. Stress, anxiety and depression decrease, along with a number of conditions and illnesses including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and infertility. They gain a basic understanding of the ethics, drivers and structures of the organisation as well as the theoretical knowledge of the healthcare clowning. A series of workshops led by internationally acclaimed artists and instructors are conducted to teach artistic skills and techniques along with a specialised knowledge on clowning in health care and crisis situations. The integration of clowning in Nursing enhances patient experience, promotes healing and contributes to compassionate and patient centred approach care. Thus, it plays a vital role in transformative holistic approach to care and creates a ripple of hope and healing that medicine alone cannot achieve.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Clinical Clowning**

The clinical clown’s role is to help restore and strengthen the spirit, to touch deeply the feeling heart, to bolster resilience and to counter the negative effects that illness, trauma, aging and institutionalisation. Clowns may have positive cognitive, physiological, social and emotional effects.

A review of the paediatric literature reveals their value in the following areas:

- Reducing stress and anxiety during the pre-operative period, in both children and parents
- Reducing pain during invasive medical procedures
- Reducing anxiety during sexual abuse examination
- Shorter induction time for anaesthesia and faster discharge
- Promoting patient- and family-centred care in PICU
- Positive impact on staff working in disaster area field hospital
- Improving team function (Finlay et al, 2014)

## Challenges and Considerations

Cultural sensitivity is crucial in medical clowning, requiring an understanding of cultural differences and patient backgrounds. This necessitates providing clowns with training on cultural competence to ensure they respect the diverse backgrounds of patients. It also involves encouraging clowns to adapt their performances to be culturally appropriate and inclusive. Ethical considerations are paramount in medical clowning. Obtain informed consent from patients or their guardians before any clowning intervention. Prioritising patient comfort and respecting their boundaries, with the option for patients to opt-out if they do not wish to participate, is crucial. Maintaining patient confidentiality and ensuring that interactions respect patient privacy is also vital. Overcoming logistical challenges is essential for the smooth implementation of medical clowning programmes. This involves ensuring adequate resources, including funding and space for medical clown programmes. Coordinating with healthcare staff to integrate clown visits into the overall patient care plan without disrupting medical procedures is also necessary.

## Training Programmes in Clinical Clowning

MeDiClown Academy offers a wide range of training programmes and workshops and services ranging from working with corporate executives, healthcare professionals, patients, educators, students, retirees and people wanting significant transformation, mid-life change or alternative career.

Fellowship in the Art and Science of Medical Clowning (FASMC), a certified programme is offered for the first time in India. MeDiClown Academy is a registered activity of the Auroville Foundation, incubated as a social startup by Fif Fernandes and Hamish Boyd. Currently, hospitals, healthcare and corporate sectors, and educational institutions are some of the key beneficiaries of its services (<https://www.mediclownacademy.org/who-are-we/>).

## Recommendations

Clown care as a research area is interesting and offers a wide range of research possibilities. Since there is still a scarcity of information, this study suggests several areas for further research including examining the role of nurses in clown care; exploring nurses' and medical staff's perspectives and experiences with clown care; developing tools to assess and measure perceptions, experiences, barriers, benefits, and factors that facilitate clown care to validate qualitative findings. Additionally, interventional studies on the impact of clown care in reducing pain, stress, and fatigue are strongly recommended. These investigations could help advance evidence-based practices in clown care.

## Conclusion

Clinical Clowning in nursing serves as a complimentary approach that enhances patient experience, improves outcomes and enhances the wellbeing of both patients and healthcare providers. Research shows that highly trained professionals play a vital role in the treatment of children and adults who are hospitalised or in other healthcare facilities, helping the patients, their families, and the medical staff working with them. Employed properly, Clinical clowns can serve as important members of clinical care teams in a wide variety of health care settings. Clinical clowning can also be incorporated into the nursing curricula at the institutional level.

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## स्पर्श थिरेपी की जादुई ताकत

अपनी भावनाएं या मंशा जाहिर करने, रुठे को मनाने, भयभीत को सुरक्षा भाव प्रदान करने, मन-तन की पीड़ा दूर करने आदि के लिए 'स्पर्श' एक जोरदार थिरेपी है। स्पर्श की बेचूक भाषा वहां भी काम करती है जहां तर्क या दलील बेअसर हो जाते हैं, मनुष्य के स्पर्श की भाषा पृथ्वी, बेजवान पशुओं और पेड़-पौधों को खूब रास आती है। मानसिक बीमारियों के उपचार में दोस्ताना स्पर्श की शक्ति किसी भी दवा से ज्यादा असरदार मानी जाती है। अच्छा स्पर्श पाता दुधारु पशु सहजता से, पर्याप्त दूध दुहने देता है। वनस्पति शास्त्री बताते हैं, सहलाए जाते पौधे बेहतर फलते-फूलते हैं। जरूरत है, स्पर्श को स्वतंत्र विधा के रूप में प्रतिष्ठित करते हुए लोकहित में इसके उपयोग के तौर-तरीके विकसित किए जाएं।

आदिपुरुष अधिकांश समय भूमि, वायु, जल आदि के स्पर्श में बिताता था। उठते-बैठते, चलते, खाते, सोते वह पृथ्वी की चुंबकीय, तथा अन्य उपचारात्मक व अबूझ शक्तियों से लाभान्वित होता। नंगे पांव चलते उसके और पृथ्वी तत्व के बीच अवरोध नहीं था, यह तादात्म्य उसके मन, चित्त और शरीर को स्वस्थ-संयत रखता। बाजार मिट्टी के स्पर्श से स्वास्थ्य लाभ के प्रति जागरूकता का फायदा लेने लगा है। ऐसे जूते उपलब्ध हैं जिन्हें पहन कर लगता ही नहीं कि पांवों में कुछ पहना है।

मां का जादुई स्पर्श बच्चों को आजीवन प्रतिकूल और सामान्य लम्हों में आत्मिक संबल देता है। शिशु विशेषज्ञ मानते हैं कि नवजात शिशु के पोषण ही नहीं, भावों और समग्र वृद्धि के लिए मां का शारीरिक सानिध्य सर्वोपरि है। इसीलिए वैश्विक स्वास्थ्य संस्थाएं स्तनपान प्रथा का पुरजोर समर्थन करती हैं। इसके विपरीत जो बच्चे मां की गोद से मिलते लाड़-दुलार से वंचित रहते हैं उनमें मानसिक और शारीरिक विकृतियां अधिक देखी जाती हैं। सनातनी परंपरा में चरणस्पर्श का विशेष माहात्म्य इसी कारण है। आयु या गरिमा में उच्चतर व्यक्ति के चरणस्पर्श और आशीर्वाद पाने की प्रक्रिया में स्पर्शकर्ता को अनेक लाभों का उल्लेख है। इससे जहां एक ओर श्रेष्ठ व्यक्ति की पॉजिटिव ऊर्जा हमारे शरीर में स्थानांतरित होती है, वहीं हमारा अहंकार क्षीण होता है, समर्पण और विनम्रता भाव बढ़ते हैं तथा आध्यात्मिक व मानसिक विकास होता है। नियमित चरणस्पर्श से आयु, यश और कीर्ति बढ़ने का पाठ हम बाल्यकाल से पढ़ते आए हैं।

शरीर का सबसे बड़ा अंग होने के साथ त्वचा अत्यंत संवेदनशील और समझदार भी है। यह भले-बुरे स्पर्श के भेद को समझती है। स्पर्श की कारगरता का आधार वैज्ञानिक है। आलिंगन तथा अन्य गैरसेक्सुअल स्पर्श से सुखद अहसास दिलाने वाले डोपामाइन और सिरोटोनिन हार्मोन तथा तनाव का शमन करने वाले कॉर्टिसोल और नोरेपिनेफ्राइन हार्मोन उत्सर्जित होते हैं। वैज्ञानिक प्रयोगों में शारीरिक स्पर्श से नर्वस सिस्टम में सुधार पाया गया है।

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