

Laughter...A Magical Tool in Difficult Times

Red Noses Palestine
April 2023



“A person without a sense of humour is like a wagon without springs. It's jolted by every pebble on the road” -Henry Ward Beecher:

Frequent laughter is a powerful tool for problem-solving, improving interpersonal relationships, and promoting both physical and mental health. The best part is that this priceless recipe is enjoyable, cost-free, and simple to utilize. Red Noses Palestine (RNPS) offers this recipe with a unique formula in a professional manner based on scientific methods for people who need it.

As a non-profit organization and a branch of Red Noses International, based in Vienna, RNPS started working in Palestine in 2010. The organisation's goal is to provide a healthcare clowning service through its skilled team of healthcare clowns, who help in spreading humour and laughter among hospitalized children, elderly in care homes, and children in marginalised areas and places of refugee.

Red Noses International -Palestine – In Laughter There Is Hope

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The healthcare clowns make periodic visits to pediatric departments in hospitals and elderly care homes; 900 visits annually to 13 Palestinian public sector hospitals and 7 elderly care homes in the West Bank and Jerusalem. To spread this culture in medical and academic institutions, RNPS conducts a number of trainings and workshops on the importance of humour in healthcare for nursing students in universities and medical staff in hospitals; 8 workshops were conducted on humour in healthcare during 2022.

Sick children enjoy the healthcare clowns' visits and feel very happy. A little girl, named R.K. said, "I am a cancer patient in Al-Mutalaa Hospital, but the best thing in my treatment phase is the clowns' visit, in particular, Nuqat Bint Batta and Simsim Abu Kakeh... every time we wait for them to laugh and sing with them, and on the last day of my treatment, the clowns came to me and celebrated with me...it was a day of joy".



The director of Huda Al-Masri's Department for Children with Cancer, Dr. Muhammad Najajra thinks that "The impact of the Red Noses can be seen on the psychological health and behaviours of children with cancer, and the development in their behaviour can be seen when they meet the healthcare clowns and begin to accept the treatment".

One of the parents of sick children at Alia Governmental Hospital in Hebron, Mrs. Dalal Dana, added, "The presence of the Red Noses in this hospital or any other hospital provides a better quality of service of the hospital, moreover, it improves the response of children in the hospital towards the treatment process and the medical staff."

What does research say about the effect of medical clowning?

Many children struggle with adjusting to the hospital environment; the pain, confusion, loss of control, and separation from family associated with medical treatments can lead to medical trauma disorder for the children, which can have long-term effects on a child's physical and mental health. (Price et al, 2016).

Despite the limited studies on the impact of healthcare clowning on sick children and their acceptance of treatment, the available research, the experience of Red Noses Palestine, and the positive impressions on RNPS, showed that healthcare clowning has an effective and direct role in accepting the treatment process.



In a 2005 study, Laura Vagnoli and colleagues found that children waiting to undergo anaesthesia were significantly less anxious if they spent 15 minutes with the healthcare clown.

Humour can be viewed as an important mechanism for regulating emotions. Positive feelings of fun and humour disconnect negative feelings and adversity, thus enabling a person to think more broadly and engage in creative problem-solving (Martin, 2007).

The impact of healthcare clowning is not limited to sick children, but also to adults, especially to the elderly in care homes. Research indicates that healthcare clowning in nursing homes reduces moderate and severe behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, especially Alzheimer's, which indicates that this so-called approach clowning for the elderly may be a promising tool for improving Alzheimer (Kontos et al. 2016). Moreover, findings from recent studies indicate that healthcare clowning is beneficial for all age groups.

Humour and laughter promote health on different levels, suggesting that maintaining a positive sense of humour may help maintain basic body health and promote healing mechanisms. (McGhee, 2010)

In 2020, researchers from Brazil and Canada conducted a review of 24 studies that explored the impact of clowns in hospitals on a range of symptoms (combined) of 1,612 children and adolescents.

In 12 studies, young patients visited by the hospital's clowns showed significantly less anxiety and better psychological change, or showed lower levels of anxiety, which was the case in the preoperative room before traumatic procedures and when sedated. In 3 studies assessing chronic conditions such as cancer, a hospital clown's intervention led to a significant reduction in stress, fatigue, pain, and distress, and in two studies, a significantly shorter crying period was observed when the clowns were present.¹



Science proves that laughter is the best medicine

Doctors and scientists agree that laughter is an excellent treatment for diseases. Laughter relaxes the whole body, relieves physical tension and stress, and leaves the muscles relaxed.

Laughter also strengthens the immune system and increases immune cells and antibodies to fight infection; and thus improves your resistance to disease. Not only that, laughter releases a substance Endorphins, which are natural feel-good chemicals in the body, endorphins promote a general feeling of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

Laughter protects the heart, it improves blood vessel function and increases blood flow, which helps protect against heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems.

¹ <https://kinder.world/articles/solutions/humour-and-healthcare-how-medical-clowns-are-making-an-impact-23693#:~:text=In%203%20studies%20evaluating%20chronic,noted%20when%20clowns%20were%20present.>

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As for the benefits of laughter on mental and social health, laughter adds joy and enthusiasm to life, relieves anxiety and tension, improves mood, strengthens relationships, attracts others to us, enhances work and group bonding, and promotes a spirit of love and harmony among individuals.

Healthcare clowning is a source of income

Healthcare clowning is a great mission that spreads happiness and hope in people's life, and at the same time it is a source of income for healthcare clowns. This system is followed by Red Noses Palestine, which

seeks, through its programmes, to pay income for the healthcare clown, noting that there are two main programmes supported by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and Drosos. Foundation



During the two programmes, the clowns are trained and given specialized curricula, technical and artistic training workshops and psychological support so that they can work in a positive atmosphere and for a reasonable fee.

This system could be an inspiration for other institutions that seek to form partnerships in this field or support it.

After talking about the impact of healthcare clowning on the beneficiaries, it is undeniable that medical clowning is a magical tool to change behaviours and psyches. Clowning, which aims to spread humour and laughter in thoughtful and professional ways that take into account the privacy and psychology of the beneficiaries, is one of the greatest tasks and its importance is no less important than that of the role of doctors.

"The cooperation with the Red Noses Palestine is very important, and we are in agreement with the organisation because it provides us with the required support. We consider the work of the healthcare clowning to be very important and no less important than the work of the doctor, because it contributes to facilitating the process of taking treatment, adapting to it, and relieving patients' pain." Head of the Department of Paediatric at the Ramallah Medical Complex, Dr. Muhammad Qassem.

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RNPS offers the Intensive Smile Programme, which is concerned with providing psychological support to sick children before and after surgical operations. The programme is based on intense and specialised interaction with the sick children to facilitate his acceptance of treatment. Through experiences over the years, Intensive Smile Programme has proven its magical impact on sick children.

Our message continues

Despite the limited capabilities, RNPS always seeks to engage with the community and its effectiveness to strengthen the community cohesion and deliver its mission completely. We believe that happiness is a right for everyone, so we always make different choices based on our values, which are the values of joy, creativity, courage, truthfulness, respect, excellence and accountability.

It is our responsibility to continue our work and to provide benefit to the largest number of segments of society, through ongoing support from various parties.

One of the sick children's mothers said, "I am the mother of a child who suffers from Ebert syndrome. I got to know the healthcare clowns at the Princess Basma Centre, and one of the things that makes me want to go there is to see the clowns and the joy that I notice on my son's face when he meets the clowns."

These messages and impressions are what make the staff of the Red Noses Palestine work like a bee in a beehive; spreading happiness everywhere and among those who are in need joy.

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