

## How Can Healthcare Clowns Enhance the Quality of Hospitals' Services?!

In an exhausting and stressful environment of hospitals, a unique and uplifting presence exists that brings smiles to faces and joy to hearts who are the healthcare clowns. These artists, armed not with stethoscopes but with humour and empathy, play a vital role in enhancing the quality of healthcare services. Beyond their humour sense, healthcare clowns offer emotional support, distraction from pain, and a sense of normalcy to patients, families, and medical staff alike.

At first glance, the idea of clowns in hospitals might seem incongruous. Traditionally associated with circuses and birthday parties, clowns may not seem like a natural fit for the solemn setting of a medical facility. However, their presence serves a profound purpose. Healthcare clowns are trained professionals who use laughter and play to address the emotional and psychological needs of patients.



Based on this, RED NOSES was founded in 1994 in Austria as a non-profit organisation, bringing humour and laughter to people in need of joy. In 2003, the charitable non-profit foundation RED NOSES International (RNI), also based in Austria, was established as the headquarters of the RED NOSES group. Its tasks are to build up, monitor and support international RED NOSES local organisations. In doing so, RED NOSES International simultaneously develops and maintains high ethical and artistic quality standards in all its clown programmes within the group.

Today, RED NOSES is one of the largest clown doctor groups in the world with local organisations in 11 countries. In 2019, our international team of 437 clowns brought joy and laughter to more than 569,000 people – and that in 676 medical and social institutions. The RED NOSES group has developed a wide range of specific formats within its programmes for all major beneficiaries: sick children, senior patients, multiple disabled children and rehabilitation patients, as well as people in vulnerable situations. Since 2014, RED NOSES International also works in cooperation with international aid institutions and sends specially trained clown teams on Emergency Smile missions to crisis areas.

In 2010, RED NOSES Palestine started as a project, after recognising the immense needs of the local population, which require both emergency and long-term approaches. In 2012, RED NOSES Palestine was officially founded as a subsidiary artistic organisation of RED NOSES International.

Essential health services are not easily available to the Palestinian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Children in hospitals could be alone and their families are unable to visit and stay with them. This causes critical problems for sick children and could even inhibit the healing process of the little patients. By bringing humour and laughter into Palestinian hospitals, our team of healthcare clowns boost the resistance and willpower of their patients. Healthcare clowns take their patients' individual needs and interests into consideration, which leads to a special connection between the patient and the artist "clown". The patient's response is an elevation of mood coupled with enchantment and laughter.



One of the primary contributions of healthcare clowns is their ability to alleviate stress and anxiety. Hospitalisation can be a frightening experience, especially for children. The unfamiliar environment, medical procedures, and separation from loved ones can all contribute to feelings of fear and loneliness. Healthcare clowns provide a welcome distraction from these worries, engaging patients in playful interactions that transport them to a world of imagination and laughter. By creating moments of joy and levity, clowns help patients cope with their circumstances and reduce their anxiety levels.



The intervention of healthcare clowns is not random, it is based on study and science, RED NOSES ensures the implementation of the vision, mission and strategy of the group, by continuously facilitating several capacity-building activities throughout the year to guarantee that the beneficiaries receive the services in the highest excellence possible.

RED NOSES group seeks to remain in the vanguard of artistic quality by providing the best possible training and education for its healthcare clowns. The RNI curriculum consists of eight study units ranging from artistic and healthcare studies to clinical exposure, psychosocial studies, sociology and communication. It includes practical experience in the hospital, as well as the commitment to attend regular supervision. Most trainings are held at the International School of Humour (ISH) in Vienna and bring together healthcare clowns from over eleven countries regularly. The curriculum is obligatory for all RED NOSES healthcare clowns and comprises 480 hours.

Moreover, healthcare clowns have been shown to have tangible benefits for patients' physical well-being. Laughter is known to trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, and to boost the immune system. Studies have demonstrated that humour and laughter can lead to a decreased perception of pain and improved overall health outcomes. In this way, healthcare clowns complement the medical treatment provided by doctors and nurses, contributing to patients' overall well-being and recovery.



Furthermore, healthcare clowns play an essential role in supporting the emotional needs of families and caregivers. Seeing a loved one in the hospital can be an emotionally draining experience, and the presence of a healthcare clown can provide much-needed relief. By engaging families in lighthearted interactions and creating moments of shared laughter, clowns help foster a sense of connection and camaraderie in the hospital environment.




Importantly, healthcare clowns also contribute to the well-being of hospital staff. Working in healthcare can be emotionally demanding, and staff members often face high levels of stress and burnout. The presence of healthcare clowns injects a dose of positivity and humour into the workplace, lifting spirits and boosting morale. By creating a more enjoyable and supportive work environment, clowns help ensure that hospital staff

can provide the best possible care to patients.

"The presence of healthcare clowns has many benefits for hospitalised children, their families and the medical staff. They create a beautiful atmosphere that helps us to be optimistic, to continue





working and they bring a positive vibe into the hospital." Said the Director of the Paediatric Department at Ramallah Hospital, Dr. Mohammed Qasem.

The Artistic Director of RNPS, Daoud Totah added: "Our periodic visits to hospitals have created a strong relationship between the clowns, children and their families as well as medical staff. We consider ourselves an integral part of any place we visit, as we believe and see the impact we create before each visit."

In addition to their direct interactions with patients, healthcare clowns also play a role in enhancing the overall atmosphere of the hospital. Their presence adds a touch of humanity and transforms hallways into vibrant spaces filled with laughter and joy. This can have a ripple effect, improving the mood of everyone in the hospital, from patients and families to staff and visitors.

In conclusion, healthcare clowns play a vital role in enhancing the quality of hospital services. Through their unique blend of humour, empathy, and playfulness, they provide emotional support, alleviate stress and anxiety, and contribute to patients' overall well-being. Their presence not only brings smiles to faces but also has tangible benefits for physical and emotional health. In a world where laughter is often the best medicine, healthcare clowns remind us of the healing power of joy and human connection.