


Reconsidering clown practices in a children's hospital: A pilot study

 Julia Gray, Helen Donnelly, CJ Curran, Suzette Araujo, Louise Kinross, Bhavnita Mistry (Research Coordinator) & Barbara E. Gibson

What brought us here?

Research about clowns in children's rehabilitation is limited - and most work focuses on the ways these practices reduce depression and anxiety for children, as well as supporting other medical and clinical practices.

We aim to identify key characteristics of clown practices to better understand the ways therapeutic clowns affect young people's wellbeing. Wellbeing is a holistic approach to mental, emotional and spiritual balance, a sense of belonging, contributing to family, social and cultural relationships in the present, and the ability to imagine a happy future (UNICEF, 2017).

This in-progress study is investigating the ways therapeutic clowns and kids with disabilities play, imagine and are "foolish" together (as a kind of brave-vulnerability) and how these encounters support, or not, children's wellbeing during inpatient stays.



Does foolish playing enhance young people's wellbeing? A qualitative study about clowns and kids in the hospital



How are we doing this?

- Observation of clown practices over 10 month period (note-taking and video-recording of clown/child interactions)
- Observing/recording clown debriefs to understand what clowns say/think about their own practices
- Interviews with children/youth who have 'played' with clowns to learn more about their experiences
- Story-telling session with a small group of participants to jointly investigate and produce stories re the ways kids make sense of playing with the therapeutic clowns

Implications:

Understanding the mechanisms underpinning the ways clowns support (or not) the wellbeing of young people and families will inform:

- 1) new understandings of the concept of wellbeing in the context of childhood disability and rehabilitation, and how wellbeing might be best supported
- 2) therapeutic clown training

In the longer term, we aim to apply for external funding to investigate how the mechanisms underpinning clown practices support childhood wellbeing and can inform clinical practices more broadly.

A special thank you to all of our study participants and staff helping us with the study.

In this photo: Dr. Flap (aka Helen Donnelly) and Nurse Flutter (aka Suzette Araujo).

For more information about the study, please contact Julia Gray, Principal Investigator, at jgray@hollandbloorview.ca.