

An introduction to The Humour Foundation

About The Humour Foundation: The Humour Foundation was founded in 1997 and is dedicated to be the leading Australian humour in health charity by promoting and delivering the positive health benefits of humour in a sustainable and effective manner. International research has found laughter to have both physiological and psychological benefits to health and wellbeing. The Foundation's core project is **Clown Doctors**. In addition, **Laughter Works** is the Foundation's educational program, consisting of talks and workshops on humour and health topics; **Laughter Boss** is our training program targeted at aged care staff, **Laughter Care** is a workshop program for family members of those living with dementia and **Elder Clown** is an initiative designed to improve the quality of life of residents in aged care facilities living with dementia. The Humour Foundation is a registered charity with DGR status.

★ **Laughter is the Best Medicine!** ★

Research has found that laughter:

- has a positive effect on the cardiovascular and respiratory system, similar to exercise
- relaxes the muscles
- helps the immune system
- reduces pain
- reduces stress
- helps promote a positive outlook

Laughter that is based on caring and empathy also:

- creates bonds between people
- is nourishing
- helps people cope with difficult situations
- is supportive
- gives people cognitive control
- provides a diversion



About Clown Doctors: Clown Doctors address the psychosocial needs of hospitalised children in a unique way. Imagine being a child in hospital, away from the comfort of your home and all that is familiar, and feeling sad, anxious, frightened, lonely or in pain. This is where Clown Doctors can help. **They treat children in hospital with medicine of a different kind – doses of fun and laughter!** By parodying the hospital routine, the Clown Doctors help children feel less traumatised by medical procedures. They divert children during painful procedures, help calm distressed children in emergency, and encourage children in physiotherapy. Children can forget their illness for a moment.

Clown Doctors work in partnership with health professionals and aim to involve patients and families in a way that gives them a sense of control, in a situation where they may have very little. For both adults and children, Clown Doctors respond to each situation with sensitivity, empathy and a bit of nonsense, treating each person as a unique individual. While Clown Doctors encourage interaction, some patients prefer just to observe. For this reason, Clown Doctors work as a duo. Clown Doctors wear a red nose, carry a colourful stethoscope and a decorated white doctor's coat with pockets big enough for lots of fun



props. They parody the hospital routine, sending up intimidating jargon and procedures to help sick children adapt to the new environment. Cat scans, funny-bone checks and red-nose transplants are all part of the treatment.

★ **Making a difference** ★

"An intern tracked us down to tell us we had cured a young girl She had asthma and pneumonia, but after laughing at us, she was able to cough up all the fluid in her lungs. She was discharged that day. She and her parents were convinced Clown Doctors had cured her."

Dr Ether: John Hunter Children's Hospital

"We have spent an enormous amount of time at the 'Children's' over the last six years and find it stressful and difficult. The visits have become easier. When our son is told he has to go to hospital, he is no longer distressed, and the first question is 'Will I see the Clown Doctors?'"

To see our little boy belly-laugh gives a joy that cannot be described... You truly perform miracles." **Parent: Kerry**

"I have watched children move from anxious and tense to relaxed and happy as they have their red nose transplant done ... the smile on their faces can last for days."

Leanne Hallowell, Chief Educational Play Therapist, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

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Clown Rounds are conducted through all wards, intensive care, emergency, outpatients and the corridors, foyers and lifts. While the focus is on permanent programs in children's hospitals, as part of our regular 'Outreach Services', Clown Doctors also visit regional and metropolitan hospitals and 'special need' or palliative care centres. Clown Doctors lighten the serious side of hospital and the whole hospital community benefits – patients, families and staff. Clown Doctor programs operate in 24 host hospitals around Australia and do not receive hospital or government funding. Over 60 Clown Doctors **touch the lives of more than 250,000 people a year**. All are highly skilled performers trained by The

Humour Foundation to work in the hospital setting. The Foundation provides ongoing support and professional development to ensure that Clown Doctors are well-nourished professionally and are able to perform to the best of their ability. All programs are supported by a rigorous Quality Assurance process, including reviews with host hospitals to ensure that the

service is meeting the needs of the hospital.

24 Host Hospitals

- Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick NSW (January 1997) 3 days a week
- The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne VIC (February 1998) 4 days a week
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead NSW (April 1999) 4 days a week
- Queensland Children's Hospital, Brisbane QLD (then Lady Cilento Children's Hospital, then Royal Children's Hospital Brisbane), (July 1999) 4 days a week
- Perth Children's Hospital, Perth WA (then Princess Margaret Hospital for Children), (December 2000) 4 days a week
- Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide SA (April 2001) 3 days a week
- Bear Cottage, Manly NSW (April 2002) on request
- John Hunter Children's Hospital, Newcastle NSW (May 2002) 1 day a week
- Monash Children's Hospital, Melbourne VIC (then Monash Medical Centre), (June 2003) 3 days a week
- The Northern Hospital, Melbourne VIC (March 2004) 1 day a month
- Fiona Stanley Hospital WA (then Fremantle Hospital), (August 2004) 1 day a week
- Royal Hobart Hospital TAS (October 2004) 2 days a week
- Lismore Base Hospital NSW (December 2004) 1 day a week
- Gold Coast University Hospital QLD (August 2005) 1 day a week
- Royal North Shore Hospital NSW (August 2005) 1 day a week
- Launceston General Hospital TAS (October 2005) 1 day a month
- North West Regional Hospital Burnie TAS (October 2005) 1 day a month
- Alice Springs Hospital NT (February 2006) 1 day a week
- Royal Darwin Hospital NT (February 2006) 2 days a quarter
- Flinders Medical Centre SA (August 2006) 1 day a week
- Geelong Hospital VIC (December 2011) 1 day a month
- Canberra Centenary Hospital for Women and Children ACT (September 2014) 1 day a week
- Gosford Hospital NSW (March 2016) 1 day a month
- Sunshine Coast University Hospital (initially at Nambour General Hospital) QLD (November 2016) 2 days a week



Funding: The Humour Foundation needs to raise over \$4 million a year to fund current programs. We rely solely on corporate and community support. **The Humour Foundation does not receive government funding and hospital funding.** The Humour Foundation's founding partner is Commonwealth Bank. On the Sunshine Coast, the program is made available by funds raised by Wishlist.

The Humour Foundation provides the Clown Doctor program to all host hospitals free of charge.

The Humour Foundation

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