

Research on the impact of entertainment on children in hospital – Case study: Pod Children’s Charity

Researched and written by Dr Andrew Curtis

Pod’s entertainment activities include clowns, magicians, musicians, puppeteers and storytellers visiting children in hospital. This work is part of an increasing international trend towards arts and entertainment being used in hospitals, especially for children.

“... as thoughtful clinical studies throughout the world are showing the significant healing impacts of art and music interventions in healthcare settings, arts applications are earning the right to be considered alongside today's accepted medical practices and evidence-based design principles.” (Ridenour and Sadler, 2007: 1)

Some of the impacts of such activities are outlined explored below before considering how Pod’s work fits with this.

Studies looking at entertainment for children in hospitals

Writing about the rise of arts activities in American hospitals in the 1990s, Ridenour outlines some of the benefits:

“Art programs bring artists into the recovery facility to provide experiences that counter stress and humanize the environment. Interactions between patients and artists provide positive distractions and lend social support in environments that otherwise may be isolating and frightening. (Ridenour, 1998: 399)”

Of the various activities Pod entertainers engage in, the most voluminous literature looking at impact focuses on clowns. Clowns hold a unique place in many cultures and they act as a great leveller, both underplaying their own position and acting irreverently towards figures of authority (Klapp, 1949).

“Ultimately, the professional clown working with therapeutic intent, no matter what the model, offers to the child a supportive, empowering relationship and opportunities for play and laughter in imaginative and safe play worlds. The creation of these valuable play spaces is made possible through the unique relationships established between clowns and hospitalized children.” (Koller and Gryski, 2007: 24)

Music, magic and storytelling have also been used to help unwell children in various ways. Longhi and Pickett (2008) found live music had an effect on long-term hospitalised children, potentially improving their psychological and physiological well-being; Preti and Welch (2011) found that live music changed the children’s perceptions of hospital, making it more familiar and less threatening. Magic has been used as a therapeutic intervention to address the psychosocial issues children and adolescents often experience as a result of illness and hospitalisation (Hart and

Walton, 2010). In addition, storytelling has also been used therapeutically with children (Brandell, 2000).

Pod's approach

It is important to note that Pod's work is not just a standard service repeated in various settings, rather it is tailored to particular environments and individual cases. Kollwer and Gryski (2008) emphasise the need for the entertainer to be aware of the broader medical context in which they are operating. Pod place great emphasis on collaboration with hospital staff:

“They [the entertainers] must work in conjunction with hospital play staff in order to ensure that Pod really is helping the children to feel better. Feedback from hospital staff helps to indicate whether a new entertainer is likely to become a good Pod entertainer. Liaison with hospitals is vital. Pod's contribution is part of a much wider hospital play programme and there continues to be close liaison with hospital Play Specialists.” (Pod Charitable Trust, 2011, p. 11)

Therefore Pod's work fits within a broader process, becoming an important part of an overall holistic approach to treating children in hospitals. This type of work is becoming increasingly more valued internationally.

References

- Brandell, J. R. (2000). *Of Mice and Metaphors: Therapeutic Storytelling with Children*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hart, R. and Walton, M. (2010). 'Magic as a therapeutic intervention to promote coping in hospitalized pediatric patients', *Pediatric Nursing* 36 (1), 11-16.
- Klapp, O.E. (1949). 'The Fool as a Social Type', *The American Journal of Sociology* 55 (2), pp. 157-162.
- Koller, D. and Gryski, C. (2008). 'The life threatened child and the life enhancing clown: towards a model of therapeutic clowning', *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 5(1), pp. 17-25.
- Longhi, E. and Pickett, N. (2008). 'Music and well-being in long-term hospitalized children', *Psychology of Music* 36, pp. 247-256.
- Pod Charitable Trust. (2011). Annual report for the year ending October 2011.
- Preti, C. and Welch, G. F. (2011) 'Music in a Hospital: The Impact of a Live Music Program on Pediatric Patients and Their Caregivers', *Music and Medicine* 3, pp. 213-223.

Ridenour, A. (1998). 'Creativity and the arts in health care settings', *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* 279(5), pp. 399-400. Online at: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=187206#CreativityandtheArtsinHealthCareSettings> [accessed 28 November 2012].

Ridenour, A. and Sadler, B. L. (2007). Improving healing through art and music, *Healthcare Design*, pp. 1-6. Online at: <http://www.artforlife.org/images/images/HealthDesignMagazine.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2012].