



GELOTOLOGY

The smile science

**Scientific evidences,
methodologies, outlooks.**

di Sonia Fioravanti e Leonardo Spina

Back In the 1990 Sonia Fioravanti and I began to test, in Italy, the humor therapy . People took us like fools.

After 22 years, in which humor therapy and clown therapy is spreading in most part of the Italian and European hospitals, I am here, today, for the first time in a Meeting like this, to accredit the gelotology (from the greek, ghelos, as laugh), as a discipline able to go along with the art of medicine for the care and for the health of the people. It's important to clarify that Gelotology is also successful in the social field and the pedagogic one with important results.

David Felten, the detector of the anatomic connections between nervous and immunitary system, formulated a question: if negative emotions, between complexes Niuro endocrine immunitary joints...Can give illness, Can joy, positive emotions, (hope, faith, courage, joy, smile, laugh...) help the patient coming out from illness ?

the answer is: YES !

We are in an epochal change of perspectives.

Health operators and the care givers, now a days, must work not only against the illness and its syntoms, but, over all, to empower the person, giving sense and value to his life in order to face the problems. Enlarge the sphere of health means make smaller the one of illness... This is the work of the clown doctors.

This simple intuition, proved by many researchers, opened the establishment's door to gelotology and all the other art therapies.

In New York, in fact, some years after Felten's researches, in 1986, Michael Christensen and Paul Binder created the Clown Care Unit in the Big Apple Circus. They certainly did not imagine that their action was going to be a little revolutionary act in the "health system". Real doctors, in front of the evidences, true, little and silent miracles, integrated the clowns in the hospital routines.

In Italy in 1988, in the middle of a big personal health issue, Sonia Fioravanti and I met the PNEI: We also answered yes, to the Felten's question, we manage to solve the issue and started to work on what we did, to get better.

We discovered that gelotology is not only clown therapy, and that we can use humor and positive emotions for many different purposes, without clowns too.

But laugh is a phenomenon that could be even uncomfortable, ambivalent, ambiguous, and difficult to control. There is an aggressive laugh, which excludes, which sanctions. This laugh could be useful if it beats who has the power, like the political satira; It could be extremely dangerous instead if it beats who is powerless or who is different.

There is also the good laugh, simple laugh, idiot laugh, children laugh, joy laugh. It is very important because it opens the mind, gives pleasure to the emotions and the body, encreases immunitary, lights up the life energy, builds better relationships. A panacea ? Conceptually yes.

to manage such a multiform phenomenon, to introduce the laugh and poetry in the sad and hopeless places is necessary a way, or some ways, a method or some methods.

We assembled one of those: we put together arts of humor and scientific evidences , imagery and anthropologic studies involving people in all their basic components: body, mind, emotions, relationships, soul. From the beginning it was a success.

This goal convinced us to create a team of Clown doctors.

It is necessary a strong and complete training to bring joy and poetry in the hospitals, including, in a hand, clown and magic art, story telling, puppets , and so on. In the other hand psychology, PNEI, sociology and team work. The gelotology represents the connection between these arts and “sciences”.

At the beginning the apprentice starts by learning what the gelotology really is, and how it is developing during these years. We work on the relationship between- emotions /body/ mind / relationship/ soul. We explore the anthropologic meaning of laughing. We constantly try to free the child that still hides in everyone of us. Meanwhile, we explore the professional role of Clown Doctor, to combine that child to the care giver profession.

In the 1999 the first clown doctors of the new born association “Ridere per Vivere”, established in 1995, started to work in some of the hospitals in Rome.

The Clown Doctor

At the beginning, it was obviously weird entering the medical *sancta sanctorum* as a doctor with a white uniform parody , a red nose, musical instruments and a funny hat.

After, this approach was surely very effective because this *infection* spread all over Europe.

Most of the people mistakenly believe that Patch Adams is the father of the clown therapy because of the movie featuring Robin Williams.

He is a theorist and love activist of the new and very important medical frontier, well- explained as: “do not heal the illness, heal the people !”.

Patch is a real doctor who dresses as a clown to relate with the people in a more effective and simple way.

We are well trained clowns that use the doctor parody to empathize with the atmosphere we encounter in this way we are able to expand vitality, spread poetry and turn fear into love.

What Clown Doctors do

It depends on the time of the day. The Ward Clowns do different things. In the morning, they will assist the nurses in normally invasive and scary techniques, mostly blood samples or medications. In these cases, we see the powerful tool of distraction of the Clown that starts working: they will go, lightly behaving like a fool, with the child to the medication room and they will take care of him joking, doing some conjuring tricks, and other foolishnesses: all of this diminishes anxiety and stress, both in the child and in the hospital personnel. The doctor or the nurse will be seen through different eyes (and he will have more calm around him to his therapeutic techniques) The child will be more relaxed while interacting with him: the whole situation will certainly be generally less traumatic. This phenomenon studied by the father of the clinic hypnosis, Milton Erickson, is *dissociation*, . The pain is reduced, and it is not only distraction then, but effects on the body !

In the afternoon normally the clowns go for a round of visits, room by room, to be more effective on each child (and present relatives).

Before entering the room, the Clown must ask for permission.

This is a crucial point because it is not obvious that the visit of the Clown equipe is welcome. The possibility that the child (and/or the parent) has of refusing the visit is a fundamental choice to leave them because it returns them a power that they do not have with any other figure in the ward. Actually, this very rarely happens, and, if it the child to refuse the clown, you can be certain that, after a while, if he can, he will follow the Clown somehow. In any case, we advice to leave, even to those who refuse the Clown, a small gift (normally a balloon) outside their door.

Once they are allowed to enter, the two Clowns can “let themselves lose” (as much as possible in such a situation): their listening capability will tell them almost immediately how to intervene, which makes their work very different in each room: it will vary according to the the age of the hospitalized, to the present relative, to the kind of illness, to the level of energy of the child, if in the room there are several children, if the TV is turned on, and so on for an endless quantity of variables.

Extremely important is the role that the Ward Clown give to the parents (or other relatives) present in the room. Very often the Clown gets in contact with the child through the parent; the smile or the laugh of the latter ones open the door of the heart of the child.

Often there is a spiryal of anxiety: he is sick, the mother is distressed, the child suffers the weight coming from such anxiety.

Freeing the mother from such a state of emotion, through a non invasive comic action, ameliorates the condition of the child almost automatically.

The consciousness of the role, the caution, the sweetness and the folly are important characteristics for this kind of intervention, as much as the consciousness of being very useful to the personnel.

In fact, the work of the Ward Clowns is dedicated to the whole ward community, from the Director to the attendant. The contagious energy of the equipe must be to the benefit of all, and the most people we are able to involve in the comic delirium, the most our mission is successful.

Thinking of the effort that the health staff does, heavy shifts, few personnel, sometimes in ward where at times death is present, it is fundamental that Clowns dedicate some time to nurses, doctors, cleaning people. It is possible that very strong and deep bonds arise, these must be cultivated and protected because the Ward Clown is a figure of humanization, mediator and friend of all.

Since folly is contagious, it happens that after a while a nurse comes up with a red nose, found who knows where, or that the Director puts a puppet on his phonoscope. A ward sister of the pediatric ward of San Camillo in Rome said: *“After two years from the arrival of the clowns, I am becoming aware of how much has changed in my approach with the children...”*

In the San Camillo Hospital, in Rome our organization had two clinical researches. Both in achievement with the Università di Roma, La Sapienza, department of psychology, the one by the psychologist Elena Isola, was pubblicated on ECAM Oxford Journals and the second will be soon.

Doctor Isola proved , in the pediatriy of the roman hospital, that children suffering by respiratory pathologies that met two or three times clown doctors have many positive effects, in front of children that didn't met clowns.

The results are very interesting. Children that met Clown doctors have lower recover medium time and same fever time. The amazing statistic data is on the getting better time: Clowned children get better in 3.76 days; the not clowned children in 5.36. The first was in hospital 5,76 days, the others more than a week.

The complete study is published on <http://ecam.oxfordjournals.org> on 4 june 2010.

The second research started from the Isola work.

It was improved by dott Lucia Angrisani -prof. Mario Bertini as supervisor - in Saint Camillo's pediatric surgery, . The title of this work is *“Humor analgesic effects in hospitalized operated children”* you can find on www.homoridens.org.

In this case also the work statistically proved that well trained clown doctors can concretely help the children, in order to lower down the pain level

I could show you a long cue of slides with the data of these two researches... But my time is limited and you can easily find them in the web.

Clown Doctors don't work only in the pediatric hospitals.

Thanks to our original method , Comicità è Salute , we can form operators with a wide ray: in fact we had rich and different experiences in adult's hospital, with elderly people, with people affected by Alzheimer syndrome ; with handicaps; in the jails; in gipsy camps; at home for neurovegetatives beens and their families. We were in Afghanistan, in Capoverde Islands, in Croatia, and in the recent hearthquakes' sites L'Aquila e l'Emilia, to fight the fear and bring hope and smiles.

The clown doctors moves themselves on a thin border ... a difficult border...between health and illness; between the order and the chaos; between life and death.

In these border territories, feeling and studying the different applications and reports about them, we meet the so called New Sciences (some of them are old, but well hidden): Quantum physics, epigenetics, cymatics, energetic psychology, Ypnosis, the work of Masaru Emoto, Gregg Braden... and so on. Sciences, disciplines and works that conduce directly to consider a deep spiritual development. So our studies, now, are oriented to have some Clown Shamans that will think in a deeply different way, about reality, about care, about life...well conscious of the power of every single person and able to be the instrument of deep changes.

Our thanks to those who, studying and explaining P N E I , give us the scientific possibility to enterprise this unknown, funny, serious, and surprisingly charming trail.

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