

Humor in Healing

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Humor is defined as, "something that is or has the ability to be comical or amusing," and in the physiological definition, "it is fluid contained in the body such as blood or lymph."

What better way to help heal anyone than by getting his/her own body to react to the healing process by engaging the blood and lymphatic systems.

In California there is the American Association for Therapeutic Humor or AATH. Its President, Steve Sultanoff, is a psychologist and feels that humor changes our emotional state, our perspective on life and, through laughter, our physiological state. This is NOT a new idea because in the Bible it states, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

A recent movie starring Robin Williams called Patch Adams is a true story of the life of a physician who defied medical gravitas or three decades to make patients laugh. Within the confines of healing there are NO confines. We make our walls, close our own doors, shut our own windows and laughter is usually the farthest idea on our mind, especially when we don't feel well. The severity of illness, whether it be heart disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension or terminal athletes foot is NOT relevant. The mind, body, spirit reaction and yourself are the only things that can make YOU happy. Listening to or seeing something really humorous can do many things for you. The image you portray with your patients can be the difference between healing or hindering their recovery.

How many of you can recall the episodes of Candid Camera and the talking mailbox or the plant that would not stop watering the person watering it or the new job applicant interview when the applicant was told to hold a ridiculous pose or Lucille Ball in her famous wine making scene crushing grapes with her feet?

It has now been proven what many of us have known for years that humor really heals in the following ways:

I. Provides exercise by increasing heart rate, stimulating blood circulation and breathing and improving muscle tone. You can double your heart rate by watching a Laurel and Hardy movie. It has been calculated that 100 laughs equal ten minutes on a rowing machine. It is called "inner jogging."

II. Reduces pain by firing the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Laughing reduces the amount of medication and shortens recuperation time.

III. Reduces stress by lowering levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that weakens the immune system.

IV. Stimulates the immune system by increasing the interferon-gamma hormone that fights viruses and regulates cell growth.

V. Stimulates mental functions such as alertness and memory by raising levels of

adrenaline and other chemicals that prepare the body for action.

Cancer Care and Other Dis-Eases

In dealing with cancer patients or others who may have a catastrophic disease or dis-ease and their respective families, therapists must be sure that their own mental attitudes toward the disease are wholesome. Therapists MUST learn to listen to the patient and then the family and must NOT put into the session any of their own negative thoughts.

In Pain Management Courses one of the first principles taught is to allow the patient to talk out his/her feelings and for the therapist to listen. Have the patient draw on white paper with different colored crayons or markers and indicate on a scale where his/her pain is, was or had been. Drawing gives great insight into the patient's feelings, pain or direction for his/her future management.

NEVER say, "I know what you mean and what you are going through," UNLESS you have been there. "Been there and done that" ONLY works if it is true! If a patient no longer feels comfortable with you or feels that you can't be trusted because you told an untruth, assist him/her in getting another therapist. Dr. Judy Goldblum wrote a book, 101 Fun Things To Do When You Lose Your Hair. Once children and adults can make fun of what they're most afraid of, they're more in control. Laughing about your illness is a stimulus that is much better than crying. Actually crying is really laughter but laughter uses fewer muscles.

There are several groups throughout the United States that utilize humor in one form or another. In Florida, Leslie Gibson, a nurse, directs the Comedy Connection and says that more than 60% of her patients report decreased pain and actually enjoy their hospital stays. In general however, doctors are less inclined to use humor, because most of them have "white coat syndrome" and stiff shirts with ties. Nurses and other professionals use all their talents. In physician medical circles the concept of therapeutic humor is progressing very slowly, because HUMOR does NOT have a NAME! Something that helps heal people MUST HAVE A NAME that is difficult to pronounce or it AIN'T gonna work! The concept of being silly is counter to everything they have learned in medical school. Patients must take their disease or dis-ease seriously. If physicians aren't serious they must risk being called incompetent, unless you're like Clifford Kuhn, M.D. who joined with Jerry Lewis and started teaching humor in 30 medical schools. Dr. Kuhn says, "You don't even have to tell jokes, just concentrate on having FUN."

My whole pitch in dealing with patients who are ill is to get them back in touch with their sense of humor. It is one of the most powerful healing resources. It doesn't cure anything that I know of, but it does GREAT things for the immune system and stress levels in the body. We are sitting on a gold mine-HUMOR-let's not suppress it. It is the responsibility of the Healthcare Practitioners, the nurses, the doctors and all allied healthcare givers to entertain and amuse the patient while God does the healing.

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