



The Healing Chuckle: How the Healthcare Clowns Brighten the Lives of Elderly in Care Homes

In the realm of healthcare, where treatments often revolve around serious medical interventions, a unique form of intervention is emerging—one that wears a red nose, an attractive costume, and a big smile. Enter the healthcare clowns, whose mission transcends traditional medicine to bring laughter to people in need of joy, including the elderly in care homes.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the therapeutic benefits of humour and laughter in healthcare settings. Studies have shown that laughter can have profound physiological and psychological effects, from reducing stress and anxiety to boosting the immune system and promoting overall well-being. For the elderly population, who may be facing loneliness, illness or cognitive decline, the impact of laughter can be particularly profound.



RED NOSES Palestine (RNPS) spreads humour and laughter among people in need of joy, including hospitalised children, medical staff, children in marginalised areas and areas of crises, as well as the elderly in care homes. RNPS conducts approximately 900 annual visits, of which more than 200 are for 7 elderly care homes in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Since 2016, RNPS has started to implement the Geriatric Programme, and in 2018 DROSOS Foundation has started to support the programme until the present, so regular healthcare clown visits contribute to an increase in the quality of life of the elderly and people in need of care. This invariably increases their wish to actively participate in life. Clowns meet the senior citizens individually at their bedside, with respect and empathy and activating all their senses. That means singing songs together, recalling familiar smells, sharing recipes, and connecting with memories from their “golden years”. In engaging elderly people in a variety of activities, clowns reveal long-forgotten abilities and create a sense of belonging. Older people often experience difficulty with mobility and lack of concentration and communication. These visits build a bridge to the vitality of the world of youth.

The healthcare clowns have certain attributes and qualifications. After receiving adequate training and support to deal with the elderly, an attractive and elegant costume is selected for each clown, The costumes are influenced by the preferred designs of the elderly and how they used to dress, to promote convergence between them. Even the names of the clown characters refer to famous Arab singers whom the elderly adore. Before each visit, the clowns prepare themselves to sing the most

exquisite calm songs and poetry preferred by the elderly and share beautiful memories with them. It's worth mentioning that the costumes and techniques used by clowns in the geriatric programme are different from those in the children's programmes. Each programme in the organisation has its approach, methods and dress code based on the target audience.

One of the healthcare clowns said, "I feel like I am building a very close relationship with the elderly and I have become a close friend since they always take the initiative to share their stories and memories."

Our programme successfully supports the mobilisation of elderly with dementia, depression and chronic illness. They do this by implementing artistic techniques that brighten their daily routines. With the arrival of the clowns, there is one more reason to participate actively in life, again.

Recognising the need to develop such a programme, especially in which the elderly are part of the Palestinian community, yet are not provided with enough psychological support. RNPS started the Geriatric Programme to give moments of joy and happiness to the elderly. Ever since the first visit, the team noticed the immense difference in numerous elderly care homes which include: Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, Saint Nicolas Home Charitable Society for Elderly in Beit Jala, Beit Al-Ajdad for Elderly Care in Jericho, Antonian Charitable Society in Bethlehem, Beit Afram Elderly House in Taybeh, Dar Al-Mahabah Wa Al-Wiaam for Elderly in Nablus, and Al-Mosinen Charitable Society in Jenin



On the impact of healthcare clowns on elderly care homes, the director of Beit Afram Elderly House in Taybeh, Mr. Marco Basir commented, "Laughter is a tool of healing since we have many elderly people who feel lonely after moving to a new place, so this requires to work on the psychological aspect which includes events and recreational activities because this is a house, not a shelter or a centre... Clowns openly infuse a very positive energy among the elderly and we can't imagine a week without their visit. "

Healthcare clowns, also known as medical clowns or therapeutic clowns, specialise in using humour, playfulness, and improvisation to engage with people and create moments of joy and connection. In elderly care homes, these professional performers bring their unique intervention of entertainment to the residents, offering a welcome respite from the routine of daily life and the challenges of ageing.

One of the key ways in which healthcare clowns make a difference in care homes is by fostering social interaction and emotional connection among the elderly. Through their playful antics, funny costumes, and interactive performances, healthcare clowns create an atmosphere of levity and intimacy, encouraging residents to engage with one another and share moments of laughter and joy.

Moreover, laughter has been shown to have a range of physical health benefits for the elderly, including improving cardiovascular health, reducing pain perception, and enhancing overall quality of



life. For the elderly living in care homes, where health concerns and physical limitations may be prevalent, the opportunity to laugh can have a profound impact on their well-being and psychological status.

Dealing with the elderly is so sensitive, therefore RNPS has hired professional healthcare clowns who finished the workshops and training specialised in the geriatric programme. "Healthcare clowns received many workshops and trainings on how to deal with elderly in care homes and understand what is allowed and what is not, there are ethics

and rules that we abide by in our work... Not all of the clowns work in the elderly care homes, only 11 out of 28 are eligible to work there; because they have completed training and workshops assigned for this programme. " stated the Artistic Director of RNPS, Daoud Totah.

The Managing Director of RNPS, Raed Sadeq added, "The geriatric programme has its privacy and over the past years we have been able to target 7 elderly care homes and we aspire to target more, but we are constrained by funding. Our goal is to target all elderly care homes because we believe that elderly people have a great need for joy so that they can continue their journey in this life... Our partnerships with care homes are fantastic. They respect our presence and always ask us to increase the number of weekly visits as it has a positive impact on the psychological status of the elderly and the working staff there. "

Beyond the immediate benefits of laughter, healthcare clowns also play a valuable role in addressing psychosocial needs and enhancing the overall quality of care for elderly residents. By creating a positive and uplifting environment, the clowns help to alleviate feelings of isolation, depression, and boredom that can often accompany life in a care home. They provide a welcome distraction from illness or discomfort, offering residents a chance to forget their troubles and simply enjoy the moment.

Additionally, healthcare clowns work closely with the staff in care homes to complement existing therapeutic interventions and enhance the overall care experience for the elderly. They collaborate with healthcare professionals to tailor their performances to the specific needs and preferences of the residents, ensuring that each interaction is meaningful and appropriate.



In essence, the impact of healthcare clowns on the elderly in care homes goes far beyond mere entertainment. Through their unique blend of humour, kindness, and creativity, these dedicated performers bring hope to the lives of the elderly, offering moments of laughter and connection amid life's challenges. As we continue to explore innovative approaches to healthcare and well-being, the healing power of laughter—and the tireless work of healthcare clowns—reminds us of the profound impact that joy and positivity can have on our lives, regardless of age or surrounding circumstances.