

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE: THE VALUE OF HUMOUR IN CURRENT NURSING PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION:

Laughter, the uniquely human attribute is becoming rare as daily tensions of urban like life take their toll. Laughter however, is a valuable human experience and is now being accepted as a therapy to cure certain chronic ailments. Glumness, moroseness, irritability and discontentment are common; the violence and conflict all around make us insecure and grimfaced and the media constantly bombards us with bad news and negative thoughts. There is no laughter at workplaces and children too behave like adults. This paper investigates how laughter can be used to enhance nursing practice.

PHYSIOLOGY OF LAUGHTER:

Laughter is a combination of modified respiratory movements. It can be defined as an inspiration followed by many short convulsive expirations, during which the rima glottides remains open and the vocal folds vibrate. It is accompanied by characteristic rhythm of movement and facial expressions. Laughing and crying are sometimes indistinguishable. Furthermore, studies have proved that the right frontal lobe has an important role to play in humour appreciation. The muscles involved in laughing are fourteen in number.

PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER:

Laughter is a universal phenomenon incited by numerous factors. The range of laughter – arousing experience is enormous, from

physical tickling to mental titillations of the most varied types. In all these types there is a common element which reflects the logic of humour. The first component involves perceiving the particular aspect of humour – its intellectual structure. Then comes its emotional force which enlivens the structure of humour and makes one laugh, smile or giggle. Next comes a release of unconscious pent-up emotions as recognized by the great psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

EN-LIVENING ROUTINE WORK

Nursing has always been a great and apt job to implement the practice of laughter in the midst of routine care as in extended role of nursing which got its long term effect. Low pay offered, intermittent shortages of nurses and high staff turnover saddle nurses with work overload and the additional stresses associated at workplace with temporary and inexperienced staff. Nurses frequently complain of two important sources of dissatisfaction which are human connection and the sense of competency and accomplishment. Nurses all around the world are so caught up with how much can be done by the client in meeting his emotional aspects. A nurse reflects back to her hospitalized experience and quotes "It only hurts when I don't laugh". This helps the nurses also to realize that pleasantness and an attitude of cheerfulness is very important when we plan our care which may not be quantitative.

THE VALUE OF LAUGHTER IN CURRENT NURSING PRACTICE:

Laughter is good for all concerned patients as well as colleagues. When we laugh, it boosts our emotional state, giving us a sense of well – being. A hearty laugh can break down the barriers of embarrassment, unease and humiliation. It burns off calories and encourages deep breathing; reduces suffering and distress; and boosts the immune system; and if used properly, it is also one of the best means of uniting people and forming new friendships.

It is vital that nurses, like other professionals who deal with extremes of human emotion and suffering, use humour as coping mechanisms, says Alex Maw, a mental health promotion specialist. "Humour is something you have to practice. Life gets heavy and humour is how people keep their sanity". Maureen Raper a registered nurse states that "I know a lot of nurses and I tell them that yes, they should take their jobs seriously, but they don't have to take themselves seriously". Using laughter as a therapy in a group situation helps participants let go of feelings of isolation, rejection, anger and fear replacing those emotions.

Laughter as an antidote for stress helps in the pursuit of happiness. Modern studies on happiness reveal that happy people are more energetic, decisive, creative, social, trusting, loving and responsive, all of which are important in nursing. Elements that can affect happiness include a philosophical view of life. The ability to relate to others, problem – solving skills, mean →

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ingful and leisure activities, a positive environment, a well – balanced life style and essentially the use of laughter and humour. Surprisingly, the weak links for happiness are culture, affluence, age and gender. Doland (1994) discusses the importance of laughter stating that a laugh every 15 minutes per day keeps one fresh throughout. Nobody can escape laughing which is contagious. The shedding of laughter leads to the development of confidence and leadership qualities as well as communication skills. Humour contributes greatly to a feeling of well – being. 'Laugh and be well' is now a proven medical fact. Humour and laughter for therapeutic value are being increasingly recognized today worldwide. Studies have revealed that children laugh over 300 times a day whereas adults laugh only 15 times. More than 70% of illnesses are related to stress including high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders, migraine, allergies, peptic ulcers – the list goes on. The treatment of mind – related diseases is aided by the use of laughter which is the easiest form of meditation. Besides, laughing improves stamina among athletes, is good for professional singers, reduces nervousness and fright among children and cures problems of snoring. When you are under stress, adrenalin is secreted. When you laugh, the adrenalin level goes down and the cumulative effect of stress is minimized.

Laughter helps to control blood pressure, though it cannot reverse the problem. Clients suffering from heart disease and have stabilized the medication will find that laughter improves the blood supply to the heart muscles.

Researchers have found that antibodies in the mucous membranes of the nose and respiratory passages increase after laughter therapy. As a result, the frequency of colds, sore throats and chest infections is reduced. Since laughter improves the

level of endorphins, which are natural pain killers in our body, it helps reduce the intensity of pain from arthritis, spondylitis and migraine. Asthmatics derive benefit from this exercise as it improves lung capacity and oxygen levels in the blood. Laughter can make one look younger for it tones up the muscles of his / her face and leads to increase in blood supply which nourishes the facial skin and makes it glow.

RELATED STUDIES CONDUCTED IN NURSING PRACTICE:

Laughter as an issue has received very little attention as an area of interest. But a few related studies have been done which are mostly qualitative.

A study conducted by Hulse JR (1994) investigated the value of humour and impact on the quality of life among the older generation. Certainly humour is not the answer to all the discomforts encountered by older adults, but the positive effects on some cannot be disputed. Humour as a noninvasive modality and an adjunct to patient care can be of benefit not only to the patient and family, but also to the professional nurse who encounters the discomforts of the patient on daily basis. Humour can aid in viewing the pleasures and the pains of the world with new perspectives.

"Overcome terminal seriousness: Let go, laugh, and lighten up!" an article written by Strickland (1999) examines humour and laughter as essential tools that can successfully combat stress and rekindle passion and meaning in patient's lives.

While undergoing surgery, radiation treatment and chemotherapy, gestures of love and support from her family, friends and business associates gave Christine Clifford, the founder of the Cancer Club, the strength to cope with cancer. But what no one gave her was the op-

portunity to laugh. As a result of this intense desire to laugh during the most crucial stage in her life, she started. 'The Cancer Club' to offer support and comfort to patients and their families through humour and shared experience.

The International Laughter Club concept was sparked off by the expression of the healing powers of laughter by American journalist Norman Cousins. As a victim of a painful spinal disease, he found that humour films on video alleviated his symptoms. His book "Anatomy of an Illness" published in 1978 established the therapeutic effect of laughter.

CONCLUSION

"Laugh and the world will laugh with you", an ancient sage said. Of the various instincts, laughter is perhaps the most irresistible, and also the one that relieves us most from tension. You must, therefore, laugh even if you have to laugh at yourself. Laugh at anything that tickles you. Laugh away the vexations of life. This way alone you can keep up your health and spirits. "A laugh a day will keep the doctor away."

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