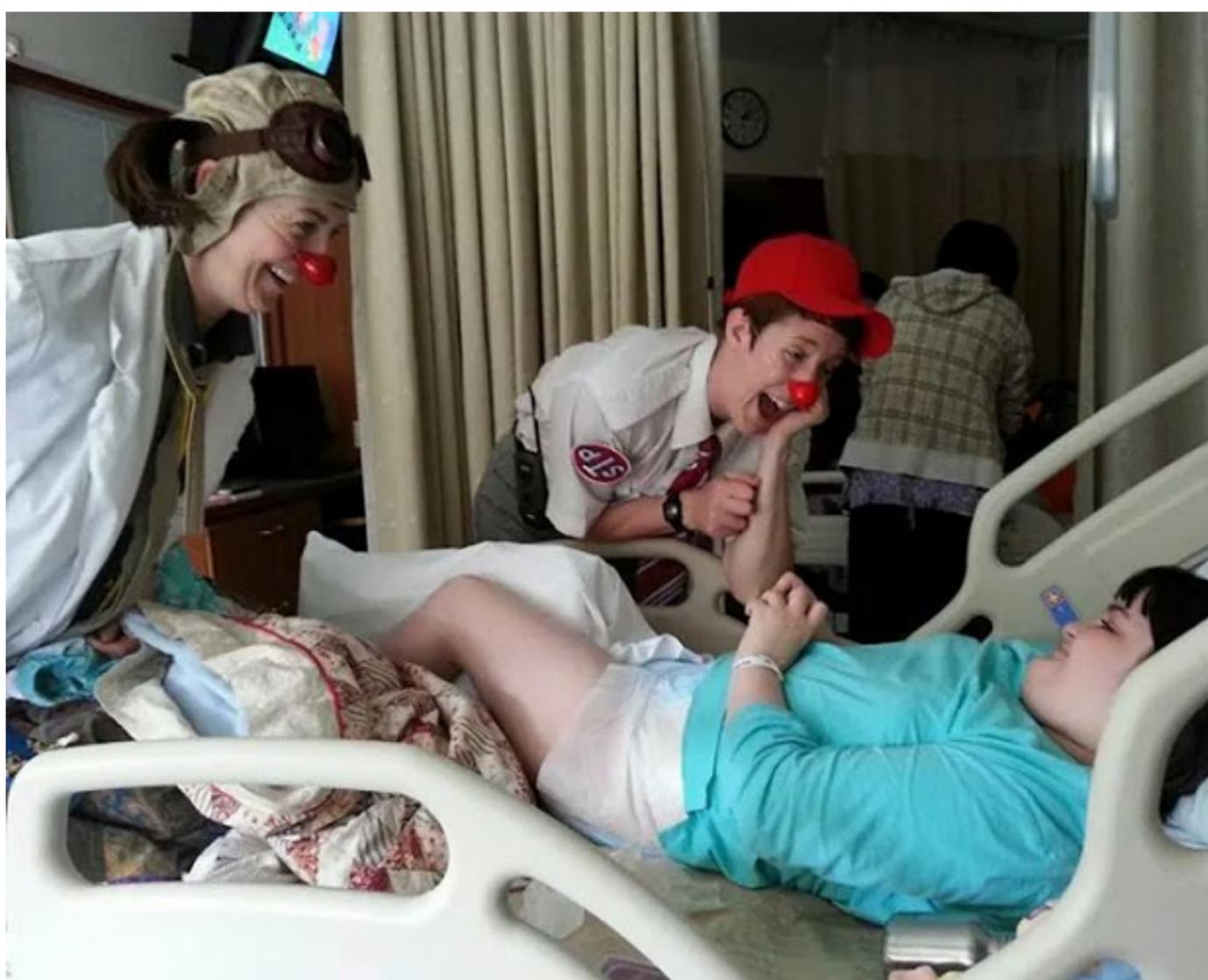


Monday, August 17, 2015

## When a clown is the best medicine

1:31 PM | Clinical-care, pain, parenting, therapeutic clowns | 2 comments



By Louise Kinross

Lorraine Peruzzo anticipated the daily unpacking and packing of special dressings in her daughter Katie's pressure sores with dread.

Katie, 12, who was at Holland Bloorview following a hip replacement, "had to be restrained and she screamed the entire time and had a complete meltdown," Lorraine remembers. "We couldn't keep doing that."

Enter Holland Bloorview's therapeutic clowns, trained professionals who engage children with physical and emotional comedy and music, letting the kids direct the action as a way of empowering them.

The prescription, in Katie's case, came in the form of Dr. Flap—known for her trademark flight cap—whose body had been playfully wrapped like a mummy, including her ukulele, in masking tape. While nurses attended to Katie's dressings, her job was to free Dr. Flap from her bindings.

"It was hilarious," Lorraine recalls. "Katie acted like she didn't even know she was having the

Search

### HELP BLOOM GROW!

## BLOOM SURVEY

Take our 5-minute survey to tell us what content and features you want to see on BLOOM

### Praise for BLOOM

Join our FREE Email Mailing List

### President and CEO Blog



Popular

Tags

Blog Archives

### POPULAR POSTS



#### It's hard to tell when special-needs parents are 'drowning'

By Tina Szymczak In 2010, our darkest times as a family, I began to use the analogy of a swimming pool to describe the difficult parts ...



#### The invisible mom

By Sue Robins In the foyer of every elementary school there's a gaggle of moms standing in a tight circle, waiting ...



#### A magical bond

Many of you will remember our interview with filmmaker Kelly O'Brien, whose film Softening documents life with her s...

#### Immigrant moms hit a service wall

York University researchers Nazilla Khanlou and Mahdieh Dastjerdi (above) share the findings of their study on the experiences of 30 i...

#### 5 things a doctor wishes parents knew about 'disabled' kids

dressing changed. Everyone was shocked and amazed. It was an amazing distraction.”

Lorraine says that the presence of the clowns was equally therapeutic for her. “I don’t know if people realize this, but the clowns are not just for the kids. Whenever Katie’s in pain my stress level rises too, because I’m powerless to stop the pain. The clowns have the ability to bring that stress level down for her, which brings it down for me.”

Our therapeutic clowns also played a role in supporting Katie during her therapy in the rehab gym. “Her physiotherapist was getting her up and moving but it was very painful. You could see it in her face. She was always tense, always upset.”

During one particular exercise Katie needed to stand and rock back and forth on her feet. She refused.

The clowns Dr. Flap and Nurse Polo assisted. “Dr. Flap played her ukulele and Nurse Polo took Katie’s hands and started rocking her back and forth, like she was dancing. It totally took her mind off the painful physio exercise. She went from being ‘No, no!’ to ‘I’m dancing with Nurse Polo. This is fun!’”

In 2010, scientists in the Bloorview Research Institute conducted the [first study](#) to measure the long-term physiological effect of therapeutic clowns on hospitalized children. They showed that even a child in a vegetative state and those with profound disabilities respond to the red-nosed performers with changes in skin temperature, sweat level and heart and breathing rate.

Jamie Burnett, one of the clowns involved in the research at the time, explained it this way: “When children come in here they lose all power. They lose control of their bodies due to some illness...and they have doctors telling them what to do, and parents telling them what to do. We allow them to come to a space of complete freedom and imagination...and go wherever they would like to go and that, I think, is so essential, not just in terms of being a human being, but in terms of becoming a healthier person. I am always amazed at the courage they show and I am always amazed at the beauty of their spirits...”

*Please consider making [a donation](#) to our therapeutic clown program which is supported by Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation.*



5 things a doctor wishes parents knew about 'disabled' kids By Dr. Peter Rosenbaum 1. The most important word and idea we can shar...



### Armadillo anyone?

Ben has been 'thinking' on a Halloween costume. It had to be an animal, he said. Today he decided. At first he told me it was a...



### 'Mom, why are people staring at us?'

By Christina Herbers It was a chilly Saturday morning as I drank coffee and thought about a family activity that would be fun for both ...



### 'You get the one you're supposed to'

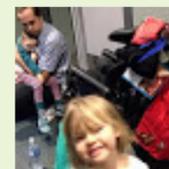
By Kari Wagner-Peck When my husband Ward and I started dating I was 42 years old and he was 29. Yeah, I have a trophy husband. We

even...



### Parents of ventilated kids risk own health due to sleep loss

About half of the parents and professionals who've filled out our BLOOM survey so far have asked for more stories on families raisin...



### Flight ban is discriminatory says Toronto mom

By Louise Kinross Yesterday, Kara Melissa Sharp and her family arrived at Toronto's Pearson airport at lunch ti...

## FOLLOW BY EMAIL

## MORE INFORMATION

[Warm line](#)[Family Resource Centre](#)[Holland Bloorview site](#)

## TOTAL PAGEVIEWS

1,432,494

BLOOM



[M](#) [e](#) [t](#) [f](#) [G+](#) Recommend this on Google

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

## 2 comments:



**Lori B. says:**

August 25, 2015 at 8:41 AM

How very fortunate we are to have such a wonderful clown team here to make not only the children's lives but the parents lives so much better - great job everyone!

Reply



**Amy Hu says:**

September 3, 2015 at 10:45 AM

I am always amazed at the incredible range of experiences our therapeutic clowns are able to offer to the kids. From toddlers to teenagers, they are so good at adapting to the emotional needs of each individual client, and offer them a greater sense of balance during their hospital stay.

The tag-team clowning model is simply wonderful, as this creates a palpable bubble of "clown energy" that touches everyone nearby - clients, families, clinicians, volunteers... Totally fantastic asset to the team; they makes Holland Bloorview such a special place for families and staff!

Reply



[G+](#) 20

## SUBSCRIBE TO

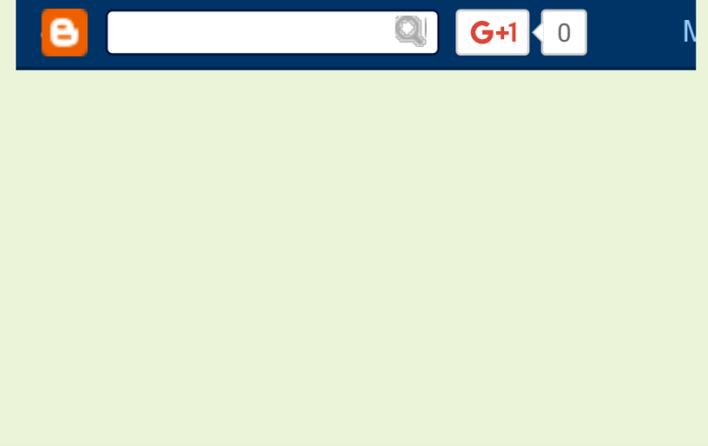
[Posts](#)

[Comments](#)

## BLOOM MAGAZINE



## FOLLOWERS



## SECTIONS

- ▶ Parent talk
- ▶ Clinical care
- ▶ Adaptive living
- ▶ Latest research
- ▶ In the news
- ▶ Personal stories
- ▶ Video
- ▶ About BLOOM
- ▶ Awards and accolades

## RESOURCES

- ▶ Family resource centre
- ▶ Warmline
- ▶ Blogs of interest
- ▶ Contact us

## POPULAR TOPICS

- ▶ Aspergers
- ▶ Autism
- ▶ Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
- ▶ Books
- ▶ Caregiving
- ▶ Cerebral palsy
- ▶ Coping and Emotions
- ▶ Children's rehab
- ▶ Developmental disabilities
- ▶ Explaining disability
- ▶ Genetic disorders
- ▶ Holland Bloorview
- ▶ Intellectual disabilities
- ▶ Siblings
- ▶ Technology

## DISCLAIMER

Content in BLOOM is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult your doctor.

Views expressed in posts and resources listed do not signify endorsement by Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.

The BLOOM blog welcomes comments from readers on issues that affect parents of children with disabilities. We moderate comments to ensure they're on-topic and respectful. We don't post comments that attack people or organizations.

