

## Clowning Around Guidelines

### Overview:

Clowning Around is a patient and guest visitation program designed to provide smiles and joy to patients, guests and staff.

### Visitation Areas:

- Pediatrics
- Post Partum
- Oncology
- Oncology Treatment Room – during morning hours
- Medical Tower 4
- Joint University during group sessions
- Surgery Waiting Room's
- Main Lobby
- Emergency Waiting Room

### Props and Gifts (all must be approved by Volunteer Services Director):

- Balloon animals
- Helium balloons
- Puppets for shy children and non-verbal patients
- Music boxes for children and elderly
- Stickers
- Prescription for Laughs
- Funny Quotes
- Smile Maker

### **Duties and Guidelines:**

1. Clowns will check in with the charge nurse/team leader on each unit to inquire about appropriate rooms and areas to visit.
2. Clowns will provide feedback to the charge nurse/team leader after completing visitation on the unit.
3. Clowns will wear their St. Joseph identification badge at all times during their visits. The Clown badge (taken in character with character name) will be worn on top and their volunteer badge (picture and given name) underneath.
4. Clowns must sanitize their hands upon entering and exiting each room with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
5. Clowns will observe isolation restrictions.
6. All props, gifts and costumes must be approved by Director of Volunteer Services and Infection Control.
7. Clowns will only use props that can be properly sanitized. If the prop touches a patient, the patient's bedding or belongings or touches the floor, the prop must be placed in a zip lock baggie and not used until it has been properly sanitized.
8. Clowns will not take photographs. If a family member or patient would like to take a photograph with their own device that is permitted.
9. Clowns will not sit on a patient's bed or on the floor.

10. Clowns may share a prayer or indications of their faith-if asked by a patient.
11. Clowns are not to share any patient information, including names or medical information to anyone.
12. Clowns are to report any patient information shared with them during their visit to the patient's nurse that might be vital to the comfort and treatment of the patient.
13. Costume must be clean at all times.
14. Clowns will not provide any medical assistance. Should a patient ask for a drink, food, adjust the bed; go to the bathroom or anything similar, the clown should immediately refer the request to the patient's nurse.
15. Clowns will not hug unless invited by the patient. Solicitation for hugs should not occur.
16. Clowns may not visit areas not assigned to them.
17. Clowns should not come to the hospital if they have a cold or transferable illness.

### **Visiting Patients:**

- When visiting a sick patient if you can include the patient, visitors or health care workers in your entertainment/interaction, you are almost guaranteed a successful encounter. When you bring a positive recognition to say a health care worker, it establishes a sense of closeness and acceptance. When playful situations can be developed between the clown and the patient or health care workers, a positive relationship is established. Sometimes the relationship between patient and nurse is improved, when the patient sees that the nurse can also be a fun person that enjoys entertaining with the clown.
- Always ask permission before entering room - It is extremely important that the clown visitor be an invited guest in the presence of a patient. If a hospital patient is in their room, whether a private room or one shared with others, it should be viewed as their *home*. As such, one should ask if it is okay to come in for a visit.
  - The clown needs to carefully watch the patient's eyes, to determine if there is fright or reluctance present. If you are unsure, don't enter the room-at least not yet. Stay in the doorway and talk or entertain. It really isn't necessary to enter most rooms.
  - Allow your entertainment, at a safe distance, the opportunity to overcome a patient's possible discomfort. If a feeling of comfort and ease becomes evident from the patient, then go ahead and move into the room. Let's face it, some healthy children and adults are afraid of clowns. Just accept this fact, so when we add illness or injury to the equation, we have an even more volatile situation.
  - Clowns must be cautious and tread softly and with care when approaching not only hospital patients, but also nurses, doctors and others in the institutional environment. So be wary of your style and possible impact as you approach your audience.
- Don't overstay your visit with a sick patient – 5 minutes may be the maximum limit for most.
- If a patient touches a prop or it falls on the floor, the prop must be cleaned using established cleaning protocol. Carry zip lock bags for contaminated props that require laundering.
- Before leaving unit, follow up with the charge nurse or designee of those you visited and that you are leaving the unit unless you have someone else they would like you to visit.
- Don't expect that you'll always receive a laugh, smile, or even any reaction from each person you visit in a hospital. The energy may just not be there. However, we often hear

later that a patient that we thought was perhaps even unaware of your presence later reported on the nice clown that came to visit.

- Always, whether you see them or not, know that someone is watching your movements and actions. Thus always be *on* in terms of your behavior and character.
- As a clown, don't provide any medical assistance, unless at the direction of a health care professional. Some patients may want you to get them a drink, adjust their bed, or help them to the toilet. Share your inability to assist, but offer to immediately find someone that can help meet their need.
- Don't overlook sharing a smile and some fun with the professional staff members. Just be aware that you don't want to interrupt their work. You want to augment their work.
- Enjoy the smiles you'll get and positive reactions you'll receive when you give some attention to housekeepers, cooks and other lower level employees in the hospital. These often-unseen workers really appreciate the recognition. You can bet they will be looking for you the next time you are around.
- Become an asset, not a liability as you work in the hospital. Your goal is to be a positive contributor to the care, treatment and recovery of patients. As an asset you will begin to become more inclusive in the care and treatment of patients.

### **Sensitivity:**

Hospital Clowning requires special sensitivity. It is the center of the clown's efforts. To be sensitive means to be highly responsive; changing easily or quickly, or delicately aware of the attitudes and feeling of others.

Clowns must be sensitive to:

- Health and hygiene concerns
- Hospital rules and constraints
- The needs of patients, family , visitors and staff
- Yourself and what you are comfortable with

### **20 Sensitive Issues**

Basic Matters:

- Infection control
- Other health and hygiene issues
- Patient privacy and confidentiality
- Physical touch
- Helping the patient understand your role

Approaching people and situations

- Cultural diversity
- How you approach people
- The adjustment time needed by others
- Social distance space
- Crowding in a room
- Medical procedures

Interacting with patients and others

- The patient's energy levels and nonverbal cues
- Each room's situation; each person's needs
- The impact of your clown makeup
- Noise levels
- The length of your visit
- The emotional climate
- The needs of the staff
- All hospital rules
- What to say and not say ("Foot in Mouth" disease)

In addition to the patient privacy rules, be sensitive to the personal feelings of patients. One thing that people surrender during hospitalization is their privacy. Complete strangers have access to their bodies, and private space and modesty is at a premium. Please respect closed curtains. Treat every hospital room as an individual's home.

Remember they are "the star". Thus every room you enter is a "star's" room.

Physical Touch: In addition to infection control and hygiene issues surrounding hand holding and hugs, be insightful about the appropriateness of physical touch.

Be sensitive in how you approach people: Have your antennae up at all times.

- Do they seem afraid of clowns?
- Are they sick to their stomach or in pain and would not like a visit at this time?
- Are they inviting you in by their facial expressions?
- Is there happiness or grief in the room?
- Did they just receive bad news?

Entering a room: Always announce your arrival.

- Play visual hide and seek or peek a boo
- Quietly knock on doors, walls, or windows
- Use words
- Approach slowly, make eye contact
- Invite interactions but don't intrude
- Wait for an invitation or permission to enter

Be sensitive to the adjustment time needed by others. Give folks a chance to size you up. Look around their room or comment on something in their room as a springboard for conversation. In doing so, you give the patient time to evaluate you. Remember they weren't expecting you and may be taken aback.

Once you have been invited into a room, allow the patients their "space". Do your clowning from a respectful distance.

When a child panics ...

The child who laughs at a clown at 8 feet away but screams and panics when the clown approaches 3 feet is reacting to space invasion. Retreat to a safe distance and wait for acceptance by the child and an invitation to come closer.

Be sensitive to crowding a room. Be aware of the placement of medical machines.

Be sensitive to medical procedures. Ask permission if a medical person enters – they may want you to leave while they are adjusting machines, etc. If a patient is in need of assistance, notify the nurse's station (do not aid them yourself).

Be sensitive to the patient's energy levels and non-verbal cues. The least energy required of the patient may be to have the patient listen to you with their eyes closed or simply to watch you. Don't assume, they you're being ignored, that they want to ignore you. They may not have the strength to visit with you at the time. Allow them to make the choice. People in pain and discomfort, tired or extremely weak, may not desire long conversations. The visits reflect sensitivity of the patient's state of mind, to drooping eyes or restlessness. Arranging to return at another time is one solution. Sleeping patients should always be allowed to rest.

"Read" the room. Every room may require different approach. Assess each situation and its possibilities. Many clowns learn storytelling and improvisation. Others share a laugh, a little magic, a joke or a smile. Don't overlook just talking. Learn to just listen if that is what is needed. Try and leave a memory (sticker, coloring page, a prescription for hugs, card). Expect the unexpected.

Be sensitive to noise levels. The hospital clown is quieter. Loud or startling noises are inappropriate.

Be sensitive to the length of visit. Don't overstay or drain their energy. Be aware of time (up to 10 minutes per patient). Know when the show 'shouldn't go on.'

Be sensitive to the emotional climate in hallways, elevators and waiting rooms. One family may be in joy; another family in grief. Also pay attention to family, friends, and healthcare providers. They need you too!

Avoid "foot in mouth" disease (what not to say):

- Don't ask how patients are unless you are well prepared for the answer
- Don't sit or lean on their bed and do not touch any equipment
- Avoid shallow talk (I know just how you feel)
- Avoid insincere promises (you'll be better by tomorrow)

### **Clown Makeup and Costumes**

Hospital clowning requires less makeup than traditional clowns.

- Rosy cheeks
- Funny eyebrows
- Clown nose
- Mouth

Make up should be soft and just enough so the patient realizes you are not a real doctor but a funny doctor. Come up with your own look and clear it through Volunteer Services Director.