



WELLNESS WORKS....

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

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Humour as Therapy

Robin Williams portrays Patch Adams – a doctor who believes in laughter as medicine and will do just about anything to make his patients laugh – even if it means risking his own career. Based on a true story, he was inspired to become a doctor while institutionalized for depression as a teenager. Hunter 'Patch' Adams attended the Medical College of Virginia in the late '60s and early '70s. Using unconventional methods and wacky surprises to ease patients' anxiety and enhance their healing, Patch helped pioneer the then-startling idea that doctors should treat people, not just disease. Compassion, involvement and empathy, Patch holds, are as great a value to physicians and breakthrough medicines and technological advancements.

After graduation, Patch formed the Gesyntheit Institute, dedicated to a more connected, personalized approach to medicine. Adams continues to use humor-driven prescriptions and was willing to dress like a gorilla, fill a room full of balloons or tub full of noodles to elicit a smile, a spiritual connection or simple moment of pleasure from a patient.

Definition

Humour therapy is the art of using humour and laughter to help heal people with physical or mental illness.

Origins

The benefits of humour therapy were acknowledged as far back as the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, which contains verses like Prov. 17:22: "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." The earliest historical reference to humour therapy is from the fourteenth century, when French surgeon Henri de Mondeville wrote, "Let the surgeon take care to regulate the whole regimen of the patient's life for joy and happiness, allowing his relatives and special friends to cheer him, and by having someone tell him jokes." In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther used a form of humour therapy as part of his pastoral counseling of depressed people. He advised them not to isolate themselves but to surround themselves with friends who could joke and make them laugh. Many of Luther's own letters to other people include playful or humorous remarks.

Modern humour therapy dates from the 1930s, when clowns were brought into hospitals to cheer up children hospitalized with polio. In his 1979 book, *Anatomy of an Illness*, author Norman Cousins brought the subject of humour therapy to the attention of the medical community. Cousins, himself a physician, details how he used laughter to help ease his pain while undergoing treatment for rheumatoid arthritis of the spine (ankylosing spondylitis). The benefits of laughter in treating the sick captured the public's attention in the 1998 movie *Patch Adams*, starring Robin Williams as the real-life doctor Hunter "Patch" Adams. The movie is based on Adams' experiences treating the poor in rural West Virginia, as related in his 1983 book *Gesundheit!*

Benefits

It may seem difficult to measure the benefits of laughter in medicine, but a number of clinical studies have helped verify the adage that laughter is the best medicine. In general, laughter improves the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of individuals. Laughter appears to release tension in the diaphragm and relieve pressure on the liver and other internal organs. It stimulates the immune system, reduces stress, and helps balance the body's natural energy fields or auras. People who have developed a strong sense of humour generally have a better sense of well-being and control in their lives.

A strong advocate of humour therapy is Dr. Michael R. Wasserman, president and chief medical officer of Geri Med of America, Inc. a primary care physician management company for seniors. "A few years ago, I came down with pneumonia, pulled out videotapes of I Love Lucy reruns and laughed myself back to good health," he said. "Clearly, humour and laughter have a positive effect on one's attitude and health overall. While we don't know all of the specifics, our immune system appears to benefit from these emotions."



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Do you want to:

- ✓ Lower blood pressure
- ✓ Reduce stress hormones
- ✓ Increase muscle flexion
- ✓ Boost immune function?

Then read on and have a laugh daily!!

Read the comics

Talk to friends

Use a funny Page a Day calendar

Check out www.joke-of-the-day.com

Laugh at yourself!

Funny quotes:

"I told the doctor I broke my leg in two places. He told me to quit going to those places."

"Laughing at our mistakes can lengthen our own life. Laughing at someone else's can shorten it."

"I have a tip that can take five strokes off anyone's golf game: it's called an eraser."

"I like an escalator because an escalator can never break, it can only become stairs. There would never be an escalator temporarily out of order sign, only an escalator temporarily stairs. Sorry for the convenience."

"Hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outside."

Norman Cousins, Anatomy of an Illness

The findings are that humour and laughter:

- Has a positive effect on the cardiovascular and
- Respiratory system, similar to exercise
- Relaxes the muscles
- Helps the immune system
- Reduces pain and stress
- Enhances relaxation response

Laughter that is based on caring and empathy also:

- Creates bonds between people
- Is nourishing
- Helps people cope with difficult situations
- Is supportive
- Gives people cognitive control
- Provides a diversion
- Promotes new perspectives and outlook on life
- Improves negotiating and decision making skills

The benefits of laughter in more detail are that:

- The immune system is improved because laughter increases the level of killer cells (that fight abnormal cells such as cancer), increases T cells and lowers serum cortisol levels.
- Muscle relaxation helps reduce pain
- Laughter induces a feeling of well-being and euphoria. Positive emotions have a positive effect on health.
- It is possible that endorphins are released by the brain (as in 'joggers' high'). These work on the endocrine system and adrenal glands to enhance the body's immune system. Endorphins are the body's natural pain-killers. More information can be found in the Research Findings Section of this site (humourfoundation.com)