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Having the last laugh - Clowning and Dementia

Thinking Ahead in Palliative Care
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Hearts & Minds is a registered Scottish charity, established in 1997 to promote quality of life for people in hospital and hospice care, using the performing arts.





The Elderflowers programme



How it works



Professional performers
Specially trained
European-style clowning
Red nose
No theatrical make-up
Eccentric clothes
Quirky characters
Memorable names
Working in pairs
Part of a larger family unit
Range of performing arts



Inspiration

What happens during a visit?

- Arrive in plain clothes
- Receive handover and referral notes from staff
- Plan visits based on individuals' background, condition and mood
- Get changed
- Enter participant's space on their terms



Two-on-one interactions

Ladies and gentlemen as starting points

Respond to their needs

Undivided attention

No time pressure

Encouraging participation

Asking for advice

Indirect approach

Individual or group visits

Develop relationships over time





Respect for participant's history, their current space and circumstances.



Why it works

The Elderflowers family

- Family unit of siblings
- Elderflowers have their own (made-up) family history: Leith and Partick
- Eccentric visitors dressed for a special occasion
- Memorable character names, such as Sweetie-Pie, Petal, Honeybunch, Blossom, Bonnie, Buddy, Pickle, Skip, Spud, Toots, Dotty, Cousin Mitzi;
- Working in a pair - often male/female partnerships
- Plenty of time, no pressure, no agenda
- Shared vulnerability
- Accompany journey



Why Clowning?



Red nose – an invitation for interaction and playfulness; a sign for recognition



Connecting with the essence of the person



In the moment, no pressure, no judgement



Clowns have a friendly, optimistic outlook



Believe 100% in what they are doing;
surrender to the participant's reality.



Humanity, warmth and physical connection



Vulnerability: making mistakes and sharing them



Creativity and Communication - a chance to give and not just receive



Access to a range of performing arts



Connecting to the personality that is still there



Participant is in control



Visitors and friends over weeks, months, years.



Feedback:

“Someone said;
‘You’ve missed your
breakfast’ – I said,
‘Well, I don’t mind –
but have I missed the
red noses?’

Participant





“That’s the first time she’s talked or smiled in ages.”

Relative of an 88-year-old lady



“Every visit from the Elderflowers appears to be of great enjoyment for lots of our clients. It’s amazing to watch the reaction from the most unexpected personalities.”

Charge Nurse



Healthcare staff say that the main benefits the Elderflowers offer are:

- Encouraging wellbeing through laughter
- Addressing issues of boredom, powerlessness and isolation
- Providing distraction from illness and pain
- Encouraging social inclusion and communication through the arts
- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Developing communication and social skills



“It's wonderful to see people like you; your eyes are so human, this world is so hard, thank you, thank you, God bless you.”
Participant



“You are from the heart and genuine friends, truly genuine.”



“You are my heart.”

Hearts & Minds

Home of Clowndoctors and Elderflowers



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