How and When Can Humor be Therapeutic?

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Background: Humor with laughter has been espoused as being good medicine, supporting socialization as well as a diversion from pain and stress. A review of the literature reveals truth to this claim. The relationship of behavior associated with emotion and the impact on cardiovascular disease, the immune response, endorphin release and decreases in stress hormones is well documented in the scientific research literature. Beyond a sense of well-being, humor and laughter have physiological benefits such as relaxing smooth muscle, enhancing oxygen intake and balancing blood pressure. Incorporating humor and laughter into our daily lives is challenged by barriers, including thoughts that humor has no place in healthcare.

Methods: This didactic presentation includes a review of the current literature regarding the psychologic and physiologic benefits of humor and laughter. Attendees will hear various hypotheses as well as concrete results from scientific inquiry. Passive humor from observation as well as more active humor whereby one creates or finds humor within unpleasant or stressful situations will be discussed. Strategies for the appropriate implementation of humor are outlined. The use of case studies and examples of humor therapy is included. Participation from attendees is encouraged.

Outcomes: The significance of attending this presentation allows for a better understanding of the place for humor in healthcare that also provides strategies for its implementation. Understanding that humor goes beyond telling a joke, that to find humor within the setting of stress or illness can have benefits that go beyond socialization or diversion is clarified.

Conclusions: The complimentary use of humor and laughter therapy in the setting of stress or illness provides diversion, a feeling of well-being but also has been shown to improve health by a multitude of psychologic and physiologic processes. By understanding the usefulness of humor as a nursing tool should decrease barriers to implementation. Attendees learn that laughter and humor are human responses that can promote quality of life and adaptation to illness.

Discussion: The provision of evidence based research on the psychologic and physiologic benefits of humor and laughter should lessen barriers to its use in practice. More research is needed to best associate cause and effect, which is ongoing.

Title:
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Keywords:
laugher as medicine, stress reduction and therapeutic humor

References:


**Abstract Summary:**

Humor and laughter are human traits. A sense of humor is not removed with an illness diagnosis, but is often lost. Recent research espouses the idiom that humor can be medicinal. Humor improves health by a multitude of physiologic and psychological processes. Strategies for appropriate implementation of humor are outlined.

**Content Outline:**

The therapeutic use of laughter and humor in healthcare

1. A look at the history of humor (why do we consider humor medicinal?).
   a. Define humor; what is a sense of humor?
   b. The Fathers of medicinal humor.

2. Discuss the physiological and psychological benefits.
   a. Relaxation, oxygenation and diaphragmatic movement
   b. Creative visualization and diversion
   c. Empathy, Rapport, Honesty and Trust

3. Discuss recent research and evidence-based findings.
   a. Effects of immune response
   b. Changes in cortisol levels and stress reduction
   c. What about glucose control?
   d. Emotions and mood research.
   e. What about pain?
4. How can humor be implemented into practice?

a. Discuss laughter theories.

b. When is humor an appropriate intervention? and How?

c. Improvements in workplace efficiency through humor.

d. Humor and resiliency.

First Primary Presenting Author

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**Professional Experience:** Gary Shelton is a member of several professional nursing societies including the American Cancer Society, the Oncology Nursing Society, the American Society for Pain Management Nursing, the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association, the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care, as well being a nursing member of the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO). He has been a speaker for these organizations, locally, nationally and internationally. Gary was named Nurse of the Year by Columbia-Presbyterian Comprehensive Cancer Center, and more recently the Nursing Excellence Award at the NYU Langone Medical Center. He has been a lecturer for many seminars and presentations regarding nursing topics such as men's cancers, primary prevention, and early detection; smoking cessation; and anorexia, weight loss, and cachexia in oncology, among others. Dr. Shelton has authored or coauthored numerous abstracts, journal articles and book chapters.

**Author Summary:** Gary is an adult oncology nurse practitioner and oncology clinical nurse specialist. He is an advanced oncology certified nurse practitioner, and is a board certified adult nurse practitioner, as well as an Advanced Practice Hospice and Palliative Care Nurse. He joined the Mount Sinai Healthcare System as Clinical Program Manager for advanced-practice providers and is the NP lead for Supportive Oncology Services, Mt. Sinai’s outpatient hematology / oncology Palliative Care Program.