

Abstract

Therapeutic clowns practice in a number of healthcare settings worldwide, most predominantly in paediatric settings. Therapeutic clowns have been known to cultivate positive feelings in adverse environments; they support patients undergoing care and treatment, as well as their families and the surrounding staff. More recently, therapeutic clowning has developed in elderly care, with clowns working in geriatric wards and residential care homes. Therapeutic clowns that work with the elderly are referred to as elder clowns. Elder clowns attempt to meet some of the needs of the elderly, particularly those with dementia.

Research pertaining to elder clowns in a South African context was, at the time of writing, limited. This study, as part of a Drama Therapy MA degree, sought to explore therapeutic clowning in the context of an elderly care home in South Africa, to ascertain whether therapeutic, or more specifically elder clowning, could, in the form of an intervention, benefit the elderly and support existing elderly care. This was a piece of qualitative research that captured the experiences of participants in relation to the intervention. Participants included elderly residents, staff and social workers on duty, as well as the researcher-therapist/clown.

The results revealed that therapeutic clowning cultivated positive affect, in the form of upliftment, in both elderly residents and staff on duty. It also resulted in experiences of positive human social connection, which appeared to be of particular benefit to a residential facility that catered to elderly abandoned and destitute. Therapeutic clowning had also positively changed the atmosphere of the home, and was even recognised as a form of staff support. As this research formed part of a drama therapy study, the study also observed a relationship between therapeutic clowning and drama therapy, and, while the scope of this study prevented a more in-depth analysis, the study encourages more research integrating the two schools of thought in theory and practice.

Key words: Clown; Elder Clowns; Therapeutic Clowning; Drama Therapy; Elderly Care, Complimentary Care