

## **TRANSFORMING THE HOSPITAL EXPERIENCE: THE IMPACT OF CLOWN THERAPY ON HUMANIZING ELDERLY CARE**

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### **Abstract**

Since Antiquity, thinkers such as Hippocrates already recognized the role of positive emotions in the healing process (Dionigi et al., 2012). However, the valorization of humor as a therapeutic tool in medical practice is a more recent phenomenon, driven by criticism of the traditional biomedical model and by the rise of integrative, person-centered approaches. In this context, laughter therapy—or “risotherapy”—has become established as a non-pharmacological intervention that uses laughter to reduce tension, relieve stress, and promote holistic health, as proposed by Adams (1998).

This study aimed to analyze the contributions of clown therapy to the humanization of hospital care for the elderly, from the perspective of professionals working with this approach. It is a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study, approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Opinion No. 7.594.816). Data collection was carried out through the focused-interview technique, as outlined by Merton et al. (1956), seeking to deepen the meanings and significance that participants attribute to clown therapy. Data analysis followed Bardin’s (1977) content-analysis framework, enabling the identification of emergent thematic categories. The study respected the ethical precepts of National Health Council Resolutions No. 466/12 and No. 510/16, guaranteeing the principles of autonomy, confidentiality, beneficence, and justice.

Interviewed professionals serve as volunteers and balance their clown-therapy practice with their formal occupations. All underwent prior training focusing on artistic expression, active listening, and institutional norms, equipping them for safe and respectful performance in hospital settings. Their reports demonstrate that clown therapy significantly contributes to the humanization of health practices by fostering welcome, creating bonds, and enhancing well-being—consistent with the principles of the National Humanization Policy (PNH) and the social determinants of health. According to participants, clinical improvements were observed in elderly patients, especially regarding reductions in depressive and anxious symptoms, as reported by both family members and care teams. These effects can be understood in light of Berk’s (1988) evidence, which shows that laughter stimulates endorphin release, thereby reducing pain, blood pressure, stress hormones, and cardiovascular risk.

It is concluded that clown therapy, as a “light technology” of care, represents a relevant complementary strategy in the geriatric hospital context. By stimulating more

humanized interactions and fostering affectionate, playful environments, this practice enhances comprehensive care and contributes to promoting the health and quality of life of hospitalized older adults. The findings of this study point to the need to incorporate laughter therapy into public-health policy, with potential expansion into hospitals, long-term-care institutions, and other care settings—thereby consolidating innovative, welcoming, and person-centered practices for elderly care.

**Keywords:** Terapia do riso; humanização; Cuidado hospitalar