



CP Photo

Robo the clown is a full-time employee of Children's Hospital in Winnipeg

Robo the hospital clown shows laughter can be best medicine

WINNIPEG (CP) — Robo the clown is clumsy, mute, and not terribly bright, but creator Karen Ridd says as a full-time employee of Winnipeg's Children's Hospital her clown persona does more than entertain.

"People in hospital, especially kids, feel a real loss of control," she said in a recent interview.

"Robo is someone they can control. They decide whether they will see him or not. And with Robo they get to be the intelligent ones."

"They're the ones who know how to put on the hat, who know how to put on the shoes and turn on the water."

Two days a week Ridd dresses up as Robo in baggy clothes and white face, the rest of the time she runs a camera or hosts a show on Children's Hospital's closed-circuit television station CHTV. Robo also appears in educational films for the hospital, such as Robo Gets an X-Ray.

Her unique job has drawn interest from as far away as South Carolina, where she will hold a workshop on therapeutic clowning in October.

Clowning is a relatively recent pursuit for Ridd.

She became involved when her mother enrolled her in a clowning for peace workshop at a peace festival she helped organize in 1983.

Ridd said she was annoyed at first but found she was hooked.

She remains active in the peace movement and appeared as Robo on a trip to Nicaragua last year, and will do the same when she visits Guatemala later this year.

She started working at the hospital after convincing administrators last year that a clown could have therapeutic value.

She did that by evoking a smile from a youngster who had been left hysterical with pain and fear after a mauling by a dog.

One girl, who had staff and parents worried over her refusal to speak after spending a prolonged period with a tube down her throat, whispered her first words to the clown.

"She said, 'Thank you Robo,'" recalls Ridd.

"Every time Robo comes in there are times when totally withdrawn children will sit up and smile and start interacting."

She said medical staff at the hospital can learn something about children with psychiatric problems by watching the way they interact with Robo.

Even in a hospital packed with modern medical technology, laughter can still sometimes be the best medicine.

Artificial insemination from jail?

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — A federal prison inmate in Missouri says he understands why sexual visits with his wife are banned. But he

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