

A6 NEWS MONTREAL EARLY EDITION

# Clown-doctors funny-bone specialists

COMIC PAIN RELIEF  
Goal of hospital visitors is to keep patients in stitches

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THE GAZETTE

For 6-year-old Fabienne Kubic, a normal life means returning to the Montreal Children's Hospital every few weeks to treat cyclic vomiting syndrome.

She has already spent two Christmas hospitalizations and her mother, Genevieve Desrosiers, knows how hard it is to be patient around the holidays.

But during a pre-Christmas hospital stay, Fabienne is looking forward to the visit of Dr. P. J. St-Yves-Rien and Dr. L. Air de Shien.

Their names and they stick their big, red noses into every thing. But their white coats are staffed with professional pads.

These include fabricators for Fabienne to watch the babies that Dr. L. Air de Shien uses, while Dr. St-Yves-Rien uses a special electric fan which gives Fabienne the power to blow them around the room.

"It's the height of technology, watching them tumble about, as though struck by pale-force winds."

"They make such a difference," says her mother. "They could be laugh from the gut."

Making patients laugh and feel a sense of control is exactly what clown-doctors Melissa Holland and Olivier-Hugues Terroux do.

**"We're artists so we go on the intuitive side."**  
Melissa Holland

Hugues Terroux (L'Air de Shien) set out to do with their medical doctor outfits and sleep-aid medicine.

They are the founders of Dr. Clown, a non-profit charitable organization that has its clown-doctors perform visits to the Montreal Children's Hospital, the St. Justine Hospital, the Centre Hospitalier de la Sagouine and the Centre Hospitalier de la Sagouine.

Terroux has no medical background, but he has no control over us... we're doctors who need help."

"Their brand of medical attention is particularly valuable for those in hospitals at this time of year."

"It's never fun to be hospitalized," says Jean-Hubert, a child life specialist at the Montreal Children's Hospital.

"The clowns can offer some sunshine, some light, some laughter."

Dr. Clown is sticking to its usual schedule, during the Christmas week, spending Tuesday and Friday with sick children and Christmas Day with the seniors.

"It is a really important time to go, because a lot of them have other care, or they don't have families," Holland said.

"The laughter is just so important to us," says Holland. "It's not just about the medical side, it's about the human side. We're not just doctors, we're people. We're human beings. We're artists. We're intuitive."

Clown-doctors meet with hospital staff to find about patients' conditions, then pull out the appropriate tricks and try to build relationships with long-term patients.

"With a teenager, tired of all the pain and the procedures... I'll try to jump out the window and (childhood) will say, 'No, don't do that,' and we'll let the kid decide," Terroux said.

Paper-covered lights work for some and others get to shoot a cup off a clown's head with a spongy bottle.

The clown-doctors are sometimes asked to distract patients during such procedures as IV insertion.

"We're not therapists, we're artists, so we go on the intuitive side," Holland said.

So far, their mission has led them in the right direction.

In 1996, Terroux started researching therapeutic clown organizations around the world and found there was no such program in Montreal.

In the summer of 2001, he attended a therapeutic clown workshop in Windsor, Ont. where he met Holland, who had also worked in a clown-doctor program in Scotland.

The 39-year-old Montabral decided to bring the idea home and model their own organization, mostly after Le Rire Médical, a clown-doctor program in France.

Their business plan was then \$5,000 startup money from Youth Employment Services and the Fondation du Maïne de Montréal.

Now, much of their funding comes from Staight Children's Foundation Canada, an organization whose mandate is to brighten the lives of sick children.

"One of our programs (in Montreal), it's the one that gives us the biggest feedback from families," said Brian Brinkoff, executive director of Staight Children's Foundation Canada.

"My goal is that someone will say 'I love my EDU (EDU, and on the other hand, I love my EDU)' and be able to be clown to respond to views in hospitals around the city."

Terroux's goal is national. "The pain is always going to be there, the loneliness is always going to be there... The need is so big."

Photo: J. Howarth

Clown Melissa Holland and Olivier-Hugues Terroux entertain 6-year-old Fabienne Kubic during visit to Montreal Children's Hospital.

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