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CLOWNING THE ELDERLY: WHAT LITERATURE SAYS

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Introduction

- Practice of clowning in a therapeutic context was developed in the 1980s in paediatrics.
- For some twenty years, this practice has been deployed in the accompaniment of elderly people, in hospital or in nursing home.
- Various qualities of the clown seem to be at work: humour, interaction skills, non-verbal communication and the role of emotions

Objective

This summary proposes to present the extent of current knowledge on clown interventions with an elderly public, taking into consideration all the facets of the clown.



Method

- ❖ **Search equation** : "**clown* AND (elder* or aged or geriatric or senior) NOT child*" (title, abstract, or subject)
- ❖ **selected if following two conditions** :
 - The target population was exclusively or predominantly older people or the professionals accompanying them.
 - The interventions studied were those of clowns, exclusively or for the most part.

After reading the abstracts, 24 of the 49 articles met these two conditions and were selected.

Databases and search engines

PsychINFO, Medline, PubMed, PubPsych and Pascal & Francis, in the English and French literature without date limitation + manual



Results

Interventions with people with cognitive and/or behavioural disorders

❖ Identified effects:

- communication with them
- agitation and aggression

❖ factors facilitating the relationship

- clowns' ability to enter into the other person's reality
- the sharing of emotions / the use of the body.

Intervention in palliative care units or services

- ❖ patients can **express their fears** about death.
- ❖ **Humour** seems to be a factor in building relationships, allowing patients to be recognised in their humanity
- ❖ talk about the situation in a poetic way, without trying to change or interpret it.
- ❖ The clown have the **faculty to welcome the vulnerability**

Research on clowns themselves

- ❖ Clowns have different scores on the **Big Five Inventory** than the average person,
- ❖ This peculiar profile would have a **protective effect on burnout risks**.
- ❖ The clown is an **intrinsically ethical character**
- ❖ Clowns develop their **emotional intelligence** by training



Discussion

- Humour is central, but literature shows that clowns can be studied according to other characteristics.
- Research on clowns and the elderly has mainly focused on people with cognitive disorders, in an institutional context.
- Even today, representations of the clown suggest that he/she is a character for children.
- Are clowns only acceptable to people who are considered by some to be "back in childhood" ?
- Could clowning have an effect on anyone who encounters difficulties during their ageing ?
- In context of home care, new proposals are emerging in terms of prevention of loss of autonomy and support at home. **Clowning in the home with an elderly public is one of these new proposals.**

Research areas in progress

- ➔ Social representations of clowning among the elderly, professionals and relatives, which would make it possible to understand the potential obstacles to this type of intervention.
- ➔ Acceptability of this type of practice
- ➔ Evaluation of the psychological impact of clown interventions in the homes of elderly people