Fools For Health, the first program of its kind in Canada is one of the world’s pre-eminent Clown-Doctor organizations. It delivered its first Clown-Doctor program in July 2001 and is a pioneer in work “across the lifespan” and with seniors with dementia. Fools remains committed not only to research on the value/role of Clown-Doctors and Familial-Clowns in the promotion of healing, quality of life and healthcare delivery; but also on the development of best artistic practice. Over the past 10 years Fools has delivered Clown-Doctor programs in hospitals and Familial-Clown programs in facilities for seniors throughout southwestern Ontario, Canada.

While healthcare professionals work with the parts of a patient that are ‘sick’, Clown-Doctors work with everything else. Unlike clowns who make occasional visits to hospital bedside to ‘entertain’, professional Clown-Doctors are skilled and valued members of a treatment team thus an integral component of the healthcare process in the hospitals which they work. Clown-Doctors do not practice medicine in the conventional sense, rather they seek to help promote physical and mental health to improve quality of life for patients / residents, their families and the healthcare staff through the use of interpersonal skills, music, improvisational play and humour.

Fools’ Clown-Doctors are professional artists who are trained to focus their artistic and improvisational skills within a healthcare setting. They also receive training in medical terminology, confidentiality and ethical behaviour. Clown-Doctors work in pairs, wear a stethoscope, a white lab coat, red nose and minimal make-up. They go by names such as “Dr. Haven’t-a-clue”, They employ ‘empty-pockets clowning’ which involves bringing few props with them and working with objects found in a patient’s room. Having gauged a patient’s level of wellness and mood of the room, the Clown-Doctors develop a context specific improvisational performance that focuses as much on family members and healthcare workers as it does on the patient.

Familial-Clowns are like Clown-Doctors except they do not wear white coats or carry stethoscopes, do not parody medical procedures, and are not called Dr. rather they use a simple name, e.g. “Buddy” or “Merry Kay!”. They emphasize song, reminiscence techniques and building longer-term relationships.

Research shows that Clown-Doctors: help patients and their families take their mind off illness, improve morale for nurses and doctors, suppress anxiety in young children awaiting surgery, reduce the use of pain and anti-depressant medication, reduce the overall length of stay in the hospital and improve perceptions of the quality of the healthcare received by patients. Research shows that Familial-Clowns help seniors connect with their surroundings, recognize family members, remember the past and improve cognitive function and communicative abilities.

Both Dr. Warren’s research and Fools For Health’s work are award winning. In 2009 Warren was awarded the University of Windsor’s Outstanding Faculty Research Award for Established Scholars/Researchers. Also in 2009, Fools was chosen from a pool of 4,500 applicants to win one the Ontario Trillium Foundation’s “Great Grants Awards” for its “Down Memory Lane” Familial-Clown program. In 2007 Fools was cited by the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation as a ‘leading practice’ and most unexpectedly named a ‘standard of care’ meaning the Council believes patients in every hospital in Canada would benefit from such a program, and that Fools’ program should be used as a model for similar programs.

Check out their work at their new website.

www.foolsforhealth.ca