Can nursing homes be made more fun?
The SMILE study

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on behalf on the SMILE study team
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The SMILE Team

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Play

- Apparently purposeless
- Voluntary
- Inherently attractive
- Lose sense of time
- Diminished consciousness of self
- Improvisational potential
- Want to keep going

(Stewart Brown, 2009)
Benefits of play

• Important to healthy brain development
• Explore the world, practice roles safely
• Develop new skills, confidence, resilience
• Fosters creativity, flexibility and learning
• Fosters social skills and connections
• Fosters physical activity and development
• Practice decision making skills
• Discover own interests
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Are nursing homes fun?
Coulrophobia

- an abnormal or exaggerated fear of clowns
ElderClowns -> Humour therapists -> Play experts
To evaluate the effects of humour therapy on the
– mood
– quality of life
– agitation
– behavioural disturbance
of residents in aged care facilities
Sydney Multisite Intervention of LaughterBosses and ElderClowns
LaughterBosses (now Certifiable!)
Clip from ‘The SMILE Within’

See www.thesmilewithin.com.au
Methods

- Clustered randomised design
- Facilities stratified by size and level (low, high)
- Humour therapy group (179 resident)
  - LaughterBoss training
  - 12 sessions humour therapy
- Controls (219 residents)
  - usual care
  - LaughterBoss training after follow-up
- Study staff blind to group allocation
Methods

• Assessments:
  – Before intervention (baseline)
  – After 12 week intervention (post) – did it work?
  – At 26 weeks (follow-up) – were results sustained?

• Standard scales
  – Depression
  – Agitation
  – Quality of life
  – Social engagement
  – Neuropsychiatric behaviours
Between $t(1)=0.021$, $p<0.05$
Positive Behaviour

Within t(1)= 0.017, p< 0.05
Between t(1)= 0.03, p<0.05
Results

• No significant differences between groups over time in
  – depression
  – quality of life (self or proxy rated)
  – social engagement
  – neuropsychiatric symptoms

• Significant decrease in agitation in humour group compared to controls at post and follow-up
Clinically significant?

- 20% reduction in agitation symptoms in SMILE
- The same effect size as is achieved by antipsychotic medications used to treat agitation
• Another clip....
Acknowledgements

Humour Foundation programs@clowndoctors.com.au

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‘The Smile Within’ is a Hot Tin Productions Film ©Hot Tin Productions 2011

Declaration of interests: Lee-Fay Low is a director of the Arts Health Institute
A Big Thank you

The SMILE study could not have happened without the enthusiastic support of facility management, staff, family and residents.
"And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

-- Abraham Lincoln