

COAI convention goers visit Children's Hospital of Nevada Mike "Dr. Fun E. Bone" Bednarek

During the recent Clowns of America International (COAI) convention in Las Vegas, four convention participants did some hospital clowning at the Children's Hospital of Nevada. The idea for a community-based service project had been brainstormed a couple of months prior as a learning opportunity out in the real world in Las Vegas that could be mutually-beneficial.

The hope was to come up with some kind of event that could benefit young patients, their families, and hospital staff, as well as giving some of the hospital clowns attending the convention the chance to bring their therapeutic clown skills out into the Las Vegas community and show what's going on with clowns out in the real world today.



The idea was pitched to COAI convention organizers and leadership and they liked the idea. However, it took several weeks of e-mail communications to set it up with the hospital, and it was just firmed up the week before the convention. With a maximum of five visitors allowed, it was determined that a general announcement at the convention might produce way more interest than could be accommodated in a small group of five, leaving the recruitment up to word-of-mouth and good humored arm-twisting.

So, on the morning of Friday, April 8, a team of four clown doctors -- Kosuke "K" Omune from Japan, Judy "Reddy" Conner from Indiana, Barbara "Dr. Nose-a-Lot" Bird from New York, and Mike "Dr. Fun E. Bone" Bednarek from Oregon -- loaded into a cab for the 10-minute ride to the Children's Hospital of Nevada at University Medical Center.

After checking in, the first stop was the PEDS Playroom for some one-on-one with about eight kiddos, along with family and staff, who were able to leave their rooms. Next, the team split into two pairs, with K and Dr. Fun E. Bone visiting PEDS and the Pediatric ICU, and Dr. Nose-a-Lot and Reddy visiting the adult oncology unit. The hospital had thoughtfully assigned staff as 'handlers' for the two teams, making the navigating of the large hospital facility, introducing the clown doctors to hospital staff, and determining appropriate rooms and patients to visit go quite smoothly.

The reception was welcoming, every interaction was heartwarming, the expressions of gratitude were effusive, and the time just flew by.

The only real bump in the road was a fruitless hour-long wait for a taxi for the return trip, resulting in a missed group photo at the convention. A very thoughtful gentleman, hearing our plight, ultimately offered us a ride back to the hotel.

After the visit, the Children's Hospital of Nevada posted a picture and this on its Facebook page:

“Our patients enjoyed clowning around this morning with a visit from specially trained clown doctors. Dr. Fun E. Bone, Reddy the Clown, Dr. Nose-a-Lot, and Clown "K" spend a lot of their time visiting both kids and adults in hospitals to help lift their moods through hope and humor. Clown doctors use techniques such as magic, music, storytelling and other skills to help distract the patients from the loneliness and boredom that a hospital stay can bring. Laughter and humor help to reduce stress and anxiety which aids in the healing process. The staff at our Children's Hospital of Nevada at UMC are very welcoming and appreciative of visitors such as this due to the countless benefits they bring to both patients and staff!”

That Facebook posting was followed up by these thank you notes:

“Thank you all very much for coming and visiting with our littlest patients. After you left it was all they could talk about. Domo arigato.”

-- Danny Romero, Strategic Development and Marketing

“Good Morning! Thank you again for coming to visit our Children's Hospital of Nevada here at UMC as well as our Oncology Department. These visits are very special to our patients and yes, laughter is the best medicine. We would love to have you back. If you have plans to be in Las Vegas in the future, please reach out so we can schedule another visit. Keep making a difference!”

-- Erica Nansen, Volunteer Program and Community Relations Supervisor

The four clown doctor team members want to thank COAI leadership for their encouragement and support for setting up this field trip/service project. We would love to see this kind of outreach project become a regular feature at future COAI conventions. And we also send out a huge red nose thanks to the Children's Hospital of Nevada for hosting us!

Domo arigato!

Thoughts or reactions? Contact me at busterthec clown@comcast.net.

Be well and laugh often, red nose friends!

"The role of a clown and a physician are the same – it's to elevate the possible and to relieve suffering." Patch Adams

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Proverbs 17:22

"As soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul." Jewish proverb

CHN_article_20160509

