

**Review Article****The Theatre Artiste and Medical Practitioner: The Need for Medical Comedy in Pediatric Clinic/Ward.****Chizenum George Ohia (PhD.)¹, Prof. Nsirimobu Ichendu Paul²**¹ Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.² Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Faculty of Clinical Sciences, College of Health Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.**ABSTRACT:**

Like security challenges, health management and care should not be the sole responsibility of medical practitioners alone but the collaboration of all and sundry. The need to incorporate the services of a theatre artiste in paediatric medicine should not be taken for granted. It is because encouraging comic theatics and its attendant clown elements will facilitate smooth administration of care and healing in the paediatric ward. It is therefore the responsibility of a comedian (theatre artiste) to provide subtle jokes to divert the attention of a child from gazing at or rather being hostile to a doctor in the course of his or her duty. The use of comedy or medical clowns in paediatric clinics/wards lightens the hearts of both the medical doctor and the patients, thereby making the clinic exciting and allowing a free flow of medical attention. It is on the foregoing that this research deems it appropriate to seek synergy between the theatre artistes and medical practitioners in the provision and management of healthcare in the paediatric clinic/ward. This work employed analytical, literary, and socio-medical approaches. It also employed the relief theory of humour and Anna Freud's theory of child psychology as critical pivots in the analysis of the topic under study. The work advocates for the interchange of ideas and synergy between the theatre artiste and medical doctor as a tool to enhance effective and efficient healthcare delivery in the paediatric clinic/ward.

Keywords: *Theatre, Medicine, Artiste, Comedy, Paediatric Clinic/Ward, and Doctor.*

INTRODUCTION

There is no gainsaying the fact that achieving a healthy society requires the collaborative efforts of all and sundry. This, according to an adage, "a healthy society is a healthy nation." On this note, therefore, conscious efforts should be made in achieving a healthy society. It must be emphasised at this juncture that healthcare is one of the important aspects of human society. Therefore, medical practitioners and other allied institutions must, as a matter of fact, synergise to maintain and sustain a healthy environment.

The crux of this paper is to seek the cooperation of theatre artists and medical doctors in attending to the health challenges of children in the paediatric emergency wards/room/ clinic/ through the use of humour and other theatics. It is common knowledge that setting up an intravenous (iv)

medications to children in the paediatric ward is quite challenging due to their young age and phobia. This singular challenge has spurred some creative medical doctors to devise means such as comic approaches to douse emotional stresses in the minds of the patient child. This is why some of them would sing or clap hands for the sick child as the use attractive toys, phones and games just to make him or her laugh, thus enhancing seemingly stress-free medication. This singular approach needs the attention, expertise, and cooperation of a comedian (clown or jester), physical or virtually in employing comic elements to ensure partnership in healthcare delivery. To this end, therefore, the paper is explicit in soliciting a joint partnership between the theatre comedian and medical doctor in paediatric healthcare. This synergy will not only create comic scenes but also enhance quality, stress-free, peace, harmony, and thus improve quality and standard healthcare delivery amongst the children. This

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purposeful interaction between the theatre artist and the medical doctor will enhance the child's cooperation, ease off some stress on the child, allay anxiety and enhance speed in treatment. It is hopeful that the act of medical comedy will rejuvenate the emotions of the paediatric patients and make the services of the healthcare service provider especially; paediatricians or those involved in child care easy.

Medical Comedy: The Thematic Focus

The word medical comedy, as it is used in this work, refers to laughter or comic elements that emanate from the use of humour (comics) in medical services. The attendance to the medical needs of paediatric patients is not always easy due to the tender age of the children and its attendant complications. However, the use of humour most times lightens the minds of the said patients and thus creates medical harmony. Never the less, the sole intention of the humour may not be necessarily funny as it were but targets to shift the focus of the

child away from the painful medical procedure. In this context however, it must be emphasised that humour must seek to attract the keen interest of the patient child. It is claimed that a sense of humour is defined as "the ability to perceive certain phenomena as funny and amusing as well as the skills of telling hilarious stories and provoking funny situations" (www.researchgate.net). It is also revealed that humour is the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny. (www.jonathansandling.com). The thematic focus here is the need to continually encourage the services of comedians as a deliberate ploy in making the health services, or rather the administration of medical needs of children in the paediatric ward, less cumbersome.

To further enhance thorough analysis and explanation of the concept of comedy, it will be apropos to define the term comedy. Generally speaking, comedy is a genre of drama that creates laughter. It is on this note that Ohia (2022) asserts that:

The comic drama also relieves human emotions. Comedy, as a sub-genre of drama, focuses on reducing the tension associated with the stress of life by providing laughter (p. 32).

In support of the above claim, Aristotle, quoted in Ohia (2022), posits that

Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists of some defect or ugliness that is not painful or destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted but does not imply pain (p. 32).

The focus of comedy essentially is to provide laughter and consequently lighten the emotions of the audience. In his opinion about the nature and characteristics of comedy, Imo (2014) informs that "comedy is a dramatic or performance mode that is

light in tone and thrives on the ridiculous, ludicrous, incongruous, and human foibles in society in order to amuse" (p. 12).

However, the definitions and opinions of scholars, comedy pokes fun and creates laughter. One of the basic ingredients of comedy is humour to amuse. Nonetheless, the beautiful attributes of comedy, the target of this paper, is the call for synergy or collaboration between the medical practitioner (doctor) and the theatre comedian in the day-to-day healthcare administration in the paediatric clinic/ward. It is a known fact that the

efforts of medical doctors in saving lives cannot be overemphasised. This is because they are practitioners who are trained to handle or take medical care of patients. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a medical officer is “a person, usually a doctor, employed in an organisation to deal with medical and health matters” (2015, p. 967). In furtherance to the above definition, it reveals that:

A doctor is someone who is experienced and certified to practice medicine to help maintain or restore physical and mental health. A doctor is tasked with interacting with patients, diagnosing medical problems, and successfully treating illness or injury” (www.indeed.com/career-ad).

A medical doctor is saddled with the responsibility of safeguarding lives through his or her professional skills, especially as it relates to caregiving in the paediatric clinic/ward. To effectively carry out a duty, the paper identifies the need for a doctor to incorporate comic approaches (humorous skills) to enhance productivity.

Having critically evaluated the cogent need for medical comedy and its thematic focus, the work is of the opinion that the target of medical comedy is to provide the needed laughter/humour to encourage paediatric patients to be attended to by the medical doctor in the paediatric clinic.

Paediatric Clinic in Medical Practice: A Review

Like the adults, children need adequate healthcare to better their lives. Most times, children's illnesses are more complicated due to their tender and vulnerable ages. This is why government and well-spirited individuals pay close attention to monitoring and sponsoring the medical treatment of children in some paediatric wards in a hospital. Revealing the nature and characteristics of paediatrics, it is stated that:

Paediatrics is the branch of medicine dealing with the health and medical care of infants, children, and adolescents from birth up to the age of 18. The word “paediatrics” means “healer of children”; it is derived from two Greek words: (pais = child) and (iatros = doctor or healer). Paediatrics is a relatively new medical speciality, developing only in the mid-19th century. Abraham Jacobi (1830–1919) is known as the father of paediatrics. (www.news-medical.net)

The role of a medical doctor in a paediatric clinic/ward cannot be overstated. This is because he or she oversees the medical needs of children in the clinic or ward. A paediatrician ensures that the

physical, emotional, and psychological needs of children under his or her watch are adequately taken care of. This is stated thus:

A paediatrician is a child's physician who provides not only medical care for children who are acutely or chronically ill but also preventive health services for healthy children. A paediatrician manages the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the children under their care at every stage of development, in both sickness and health. (www.news-medical.net)

The Artiste and Medical Doctor: The Need for Synergy

There is no gainsaying the fact that paediatrics is a collaborative speciality. Collaboration is a necessary ingredient that enables the medical services and its need to incorporate theatrical activities in the day-to-day administration in paediatric medicine. Therefore, paediatricians need to work closely with other medical specialists and healthcare professionals and subspecialists of paediatrics to help children with problems.” (www.news-medical.net)

The collaboration, as a matter of fact, should be extended to incorporate the services of a theatre artist (comedian) in ensuring effective and efficient healthcare services. As an entertainer, an artist is saddled with the responsibility of providing entertainment, resort, and atmosphere that will help to divert the attention of paediatric patients from the seemingly threatened medical service and equipment. As a comedian, he uses his or her talent and creative anecdotes to make the activities in the paediatric clinic/ward lively. In this peaceful, creative, and comical atmosphere, the medical doctor leverages on that to attend to the health needs of the patients. It is on this score that it becomes necessary for the professionals to work together to better the lives of paediatric patients.

The Theatre Artiste: A Need for Career: To say the least, career development in any profession of human endeavour is a recipe for societal advancement. No doubt, career engagement distinguishes one profession from another. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a career is “the series of jobs that a person has in a particular area of work, usually involving more responsibility as time passes” (p. 222). As a professional discipline and career, theatre arts have contributed largely to the advancement of the creative industry (Nollywood) and its attendant socio-economic growth in Nigeria.

Theatre arts has the potential to not only entertain the audience but also provide necessary information and thus educate the target audience. From its classical beginning, theatrical performances have been used as instruments of social change and advocacy. In unravelling the nature and characteristics of theatre, many scholars have defined the concept of theatre in diverse opinions. In the words of Brockett and Ball (2004, p. 3), “Theatre is a complex art at least twenty-five hundred years old.” Theatre is made up of several creative/artistic elements such as the story or scenario, the stage, actors, director, scenery, and audience, among others. Supporting the above explanation, Krama informs that:

Ordinarily, the theatre refers to a place or building where plays are performed. However, that has been defined in several ways. Irisoanga (2000:3) defined it as a collective art because a group of people united by a common objective and direction are involved” (p.1).

Theatre is a creative enterprise that is anchored on collaboration. This is why every unit or aspect of the theatre must, as a matter of fact, work together to

achieve performance that meets the audience's delight. However, Ohiri (2010) reveals more on the origin and nature of theatre thus:

The word “theatre” is derived from the Greek word “theatron,” which means “a place for seeing.”. In this sense, it has been said to be describing an architectural structure built to house dramatic offerings and/or other types of presentations. Viewed from another perspective of this definition, “a place for seeing.”. It can also be seen as an “area” (without any architectural building) for the performance of plays and for dramatic spectacles—in other words, a “scene of important event” (p. 4).

The role and responsibility of a theatre artist in nation building cannot be overemphasised. This is because he or she is saddled with the task of ensuring the sustainability and maintenance of peace, unity, and justice through the creative talents. As a career, the theatre artist uses his or her creative enterprise to carve for himself or herself socio-economic and political niches in the society. A theatre artist as a social reformer and crusader tilts his or her performances toward examining the social inadequacies in society. The essence is to criticise the social evils bedevilling the society through their creative and dramatic works. Theatre/dramatic arts as a career helps not only to help the artist survive economically but also to engender political growth and other sundry development in Nigeria as a nation.

Theoretical Clarification: A Focus on Relief Theory of Humour and Anna Freud's Theory of Child Psychology:

Theory is a guide or direction to achieving a goal. This is because it helps to give or prepare a framework for analysis, especially as it concerns critical literary reviews. It is on this note that the work will focus primarily on the relief theory of humour and Anna Freud's theory of child psychology as critical shoulders for examination. It is no doubt to state that humour is a basic ingredient that causes laughter. It is on this premise that the work agrees that there are various theories of humour that ignite laughter. However, the study will leverage relief theory as a roadmap in examining comedy in paediatric medical services. The basic concern of the relief theory of humour is its ability to create emotional relief for patients undergoing medical treatment. The application of relief theory as a cornerstone in the development of medical comedy serves as a catalyst in analysing critical works such as this. It is claimed that humour technique has psychological and emotional impacts in its use and application in comic situations, thus:

According to the relief theory, people experience humour and engage in laughter because they sense that stress is reduced in doing so. Alternately, people may laugh at something humorous, which then results in a feeling of mirth and sense of relief. Relief may involve a cognitive release from anxiety or a physical release of tension. The physiological benefits of laughter most closely align with this theoretical perspective, as many negative health conditions are exacerbated by stress, and laughter has been shown to reduce the symptoms of such conditions. (www.archive.org).

Relief theory is a crucial path that comedians or clowns adopt in ensuring that the target audience purges themselves of emotional stress and thus

creates a healthy work environment. This is better explained thus:

A more conventional version of the Relief Theory is that we experience a pleasant sensation when humour replaces negative feelings like pain or sadness. The theory does not really give an explanation as to why we find

humour funny and can, in fact, be seen as a theory of laughter.
(www.archive.org)

Having examined relief humour theory, the work shall briefly explain the concept of Anna Freud's theory of child psychology. Sigmund Freud has various theories in relation to human psychology. These theories have paved the way for

other pundits and theorists to criticise and develop other theories and concepts to suit their perception of life, such as Anna Freud's theory of child psychology. This theory focuses on the psychological disposition of children as stated thus:

Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud, significantly advanced the field of child psychoanalysis. She emphasised the importance of the ego and its defensive mechanisms, helping to elucidate how children's emotional conflicts influence their development. Additionally, she founded the Hampstead Child Therapy course and clinic in London, contributing to the establishment of psychoanalytic child therapy as a distinct discipline.
(www.simplypsychology.org)

This theory is adequate in this study in that it touches on the emotions and psychology of children. "At Anna Freud, our vision is a world where all children and young people are able to achieve their full potential. A world in which they and their families get support that is designed with their input, available at the right time, and meets their needs, so that they can develop their emotional and mental health" (www.open.Baypath.edu). Unarguably, this research concerns itself with the paediatric healthcare of children with various complaints and diseases needing medical attention; hence, the need and application of Anna Freud's theory of child psychology.

Training in Fundamentals of Theatre Arts:

Every discipline, either in the arts or medicine, is subject to foundational training guides. This approach helps the trainee to understand and appreciate the basics of his or her profession. To this end, therefore, an artist or medical practitioner who is interested in theatre/dramatic activities or performances needs to undergo the rudiments of theatre arts. This fundamental training will not only enhance the development of his/her creative talents but also teach the required theatrical/dramatic theories as critical pivots or guides in the chosen

career. Among the fundamental courses or training to undergo in the Arts of the Theatre are acting, directing, management, lighting and scenography, playwriting, costume, and makeup arts, among others.

i. Acting: The concept of acting in this context is make-believe. Generally, acting is an imitation of action that is carried out by an actor on stage before the audience. To effectively imitate a character, an actor uses his or her body and voice as tools for communication. Acting is "the art or practice of representing a character on a stage or before cameras." (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acting). It is also emphasised that "acting is the work of an actor or actress, which is a person in theatre, television, film, or any other storytelling medium who tells the story by portraying a character and, usually, speaking or singing the written text or play" (www.google.com). However, understanding relevant acting theories such as Brechtian theory and Constantin Stanislavski theory, among others, is expected of a would-be or trainee actor.

ii. Directing: Directing is another important aspect of the fundamentals of theatre arts. A director is a creative theatre artist whose responsibility is to

interpret the playwright's intention, feelings, and social vision, and, of course, emotions as presented or rather documented in a play text. Put together, the art of interpreting a play is referred to and called directing. "The directorial art involves the ability to peruse a playwright's script (where there is one) thoroughly, discover the intended message for the audience, and be able to communicate such a message to the actors and actresses who, ultimately, constitute the conduit between the text and the audience" (Emasealu 2010, p. 73). To effectively create theatrical direction, a medical practitioner who is interested in medical comedy or other related comic theatics needs to be encouraged to undergo courses or training in directing to enhance capacity.

iii. Playwriting: This aspect is as important as other fundamental courses in the arts of the theatre. However, playwriting is not an 'all comers' affair. It is designated for those who are creatively talented and exceptional in dramaturgy. It is basically craft and construction-orientated. The need to undergo this aspect of the theatre arts is to inundate the trainee with the techniques and theories of playwriting. A playwright is a creative artist who copies and reenacts the microcosm of the society in the form of a play. The intention may not only be geared towards literary documentation but rather the graphic presentation of the social facts on stage before the audience. When an interested medical practitioner undergoes this program or training, the person is adequately equipped on how to unite his ideas, scenario, or event in drama text (play).

iv. Costume and Makeup Arts: Fundamentally speaking, costume and makeup arts is key in any theatrical/dramatic performance. A costume is a cloth worn by an actor on stage before the audience. Costume most times is accompanied by relevant makeups to enhance characterisation. It is therefore on this note that the would-be theatre artist is encouraged to learn costume and makeup arts as a skill and tool of communication. It is also important to state that costume and makeup arts do not only enhance characterisation but also help in creating visual imagery and thus, reinforce mood and emotion.

Social Interaction in Practice:

It is expedient to state that social harmony and interactions are necessary factors that build up confidence and cooperation amongst the theatre artist and medical personnel in the paediatric clinic/ward. Socialisation helps in understanding human emotional and psychological dispositions. Most times, social interactionism liberates the minds and thus creates a conducive work/social atmosphere.

Teamwork and Collaboration:

To enhance effective and efficient goal-orientated targets, the need for teamwork and collaboration cannot be underestimated. In this paper, emphasis is geared towards achieving synergy/collaboration between the theatre artist and medical practitioners in providing adequate healthcare and treatment to paediatric patients. The paper further advocates for interactions in career practice as key to achieving the needed set objectives. This explains the quest to undertake relevant training in the fundamentals of theatre arts. This move is necessary because when such skills or knowledge are obtained, it helps in making caregiving easier and better. Again, since the two personnel (of different disciplines) are saddled with the responsibility of providing, or rather, giving care to children in paediatric services, it is expected that they work as a team. When this is done, the patient's guidance and carers will have the course to be satisfied and joyous in achieving quality healthcare delivery.

CONCLUSION:

The paper interrogates the synergy between theatre artists and medical practitioners in providing adequate medical treatments in the paediatric clinic/ward through the instrumentality of medical comedy. Medical comedy, as used in this context (paper), refers to comics or comical approaches or situations that enable or make the paediatric patients (children) laugh and seemingly enjoy their stay in the ward; thus, it creates room for doctors to administer treatment to them. The paper identified that teamwork and collaboration amongst the concerned practitioners will go a long way in enhancing quality healthcare delivery amongst the children in the paediatric ward. Similarly, the paper

emphasised the need to indulge in professional training, especially as it concerns fundamental courses in the arts of theatre. This, as a matter of fact, builds confidence, creates awareness, and encourages competition in the lives of the healthcare givers. The concern of this work is to explain the fact that comedy as a genre of drama has a lot to do with the social organism of man as it relates to healthcare delivery. It is on this note that the researcher encourages partnership between the medical practitioners and the theatre artists in the development and practice of medical comedy in hospitals in general and paediatric clinics/wards in particular. It is therefore in the spirit and letter of this research that deliberate collaboration between theatre arts and medical practice will enhance healthy, quality, low mortality, affordable, and efficient medical treatments of paediatric patients.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Having critically examined the collaboration between the theatre artist and medical practitioner in the use and provision of medical comedy in the paediatric clinic/ward, the paper puts forward the following recommendations thus:
- ❖ The paper recommends the interchange of ideas and synergy between the theatre artists and medical doctors as a tool to enhance effective and efficient healthcare delivery in paediatric clinics/wards.
- ❖ Comic displays of pictures (children's cartoons) should be painted on the walls of the paediatric clinic/ward. This helps to seek the attention of the patient in the ward and thus releases emotions for a happy mood.
- ❖ The paper recommends that violent acts, either physical or verbal assaults, should be

avoided within and around the paediatric clinic/ward.

- ❖ Furthermore, it is the modest recommendation of this article that the environment where the hospital (clinic) is located should be kept clean always to deter mosquitoes and dangerous reptiles from inflicting injuries on patients and doctors. Also, maintaining a quiet and serene environment will go a long way in ensuring the mental stability of paediatric patients undergoing treatments.
- ❖ To ensure professionalism in the art of comedy and other comic activities, the paper is of the opinion that paediatricians undergo relevant training in the arts of the theatre. This fundamental training will equip them with techniques and styles of approaching paediatric patients under their watch with visible arts.
- ❖ It is also important to recommend the provision and display of appropriate audiovisual gadgets such as televisions and palm tops, among others, as a means of providing subtle entertainment to children undergoing medical treatments in the paediatric ward. This will divert their attention from fear or pains they anticipate in the course of administering medications to them.

Lastly, the paper is of the view that subtle music that meets the children's delight should be provided accordingly. In addition to the above, the paper recommends that the patient's guardians and the paediatricians also use subtle songs such as lullabies to entertain the paediatric patients in order to calm or rather douse their fears and pains. If this is adequately adhered to, no doubt, paediatric patients will be adequately treated for their ill health.

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