

# Meet Israel's seriously funny medi-clown

David "DuSH" Barashi, the head of therapeutic clowning at Israel's Hadassah Hospital, is in Australia this month to visit hospitals, shuls and schools and to give a number of presentations. Ahead of his visit, he spoke with Peter Kohn.

**What made you want to be a clown?**

It started when I was 14. I tried to be interested in physics and biology, but clowning is more interesting because you can be whoever you want. It's not you who finds the clowning, it's the clowning that finds you.

**What first got you interested in therapeutic clowning?**

It's not the therapy that got me interested. I came from clowning in street theatre; I learned theatre and masque and clowning. I'm an artist and when the Dream Doctors Project began, the people that managed it were looking for local Israeli street clowns that work in theatres and festivals, and they found me and my friend for the project. It's because I'm a clown, not because I was a therapist [of some kind].

**But in what you're doing with the kids, what's more important – to be the therapist or to be the clown?**

To be a clown. There's a lot of therapy in hospitals and every therapist has their technique. Clowning is the field in which I build my therapy. The therapy isn't the field in which I build the clowning – and that's what makes

it so special. But the relationship between the clowning and the therapy is very natural because if you look at the history of clowning, the clowns have been society's therapists, mirroring the village to its people.

**How prepared can you be – or is each young patient a different personality, and you're completely spontaneous?**

It's very simple. If you approach it saying that you want to know something about the young patient in front of you, rather than deliver a performance, then you strike up a rapport, it's easy to communicate. If you come with a set of material, you look like a performer. They could rightly say, "Who are you to come here and talk about yourself?" But a clown builds a relationship. If I say, "Hello, my name is DuSH, what's your name? What interests you?", it gives the young person a chance to make that first move on our imaginary stage. That's the approach I take.

**What are some of the hardest cases you've had. In Nepal, after this year's earthquake, you had a young amputee. Isn't it a challenge to bring a smile to that face?**



David "DuSH" Barashi (right) entertains a young Palestinian patient at Israel's Hadassah Hospital.

In Nepal, Haiti, Africa, in one sense, it's not hard at all. There's a festival of life and humanity. Of course, you're part of the overall medical team, the same team in which there are doctors who have to amputate the leg. It's hard for the clown but so much harder for the patient. I'm honest as a clown – I show my sadness as well as my happiness.

**Did Hadassah pioneer the practice of therapeutic clowning, and how did it come about?**

Israel was not the first country to have therapeutic clowns but Hadassah is the first hospital to integrate the clowning so strongly into the medical procedure. The clowns at Hadassah are part of the medical staff, they don't just appear separately

for entertainment, but are there to work with the doctors and nurses. When the Dream Doctors Project started, no-one else in the world was working in this way. The clowns are scheduled to work alongside the other medical staff during procedures. We're part of the team. In other countries, they saw the effect when the clown is part of the medical staff.

**What are you and your team hoping to achieve on your Australian trip?**

We're coming here to explain to people what the medical clowns do. We work with Jewish, Arab, Christian kids, Israeli, Palestinian kids. As adults, we have the responsibility to make their world a better place. The Dream Doctors Project is now not only at Hadassah but at 30 hospitals throughout Israel. We want to talk to Hadassah supporters, and to Israel supporters in general, and urge them to support us financially so the project can continue and expand. And to collaborate with therapeutic clown groups in Australia ... I know and respect Peter Spitzer [the Australian medical clown who is Jewish]. I want to work with him as much as I can.

Barashi is in Perth from October 7-9, Melbourne from October 9-14 and Sydney from October 14-19. For details of his appearances, contact Alissa Woolf at Hadassah Australia, (03) 9272 5600 or awoolf@hadassah.org.

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