

Humor, Health and Healing: Overcoming Secondary Stress

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Vignette 1: The Tooth Fairy



Considering the Tooth Fairy

- “Making fun” in clinical settings. Are there rules?
 - Dealing with boredom
 - Bridging the power differential
 - Testing authority
 - The viral nature of humor
 - Bonding with patients
 - Bonding with colleagues
 - Learning how patients view clinicians



Defining Humor: Is It Possible?

- “Humor is by far the most significant activity of the human brain.” – [Edward de Bono](#)
- “The secret to humor is surprise.” – [Aristotle](#)
- “Humor is the instinct for taking pain playfully.” – [Max Eastman](#)
- “Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.” – [E.B. White](#)
- Humor is the ability to process situations on more than one level, bi-sociative thinking, as Arthur Koestler called it. Seeing “humor” in situations is a form of perspectivism.
- Humor, is it an instinct, a personality trait, hard wired, learned, culturally based, universal?
- Humor is the construct; laughter is the physiological response.



Types of Humor

- Humor for connecting
- Humor for relieving tension and managing the stress of caring
- Humor for understanding
- Humor for coping
 - Gallows Humor
 - Humor and Self Effacement
 - Humor for perspective gaining
 - Humor, flow and productivity
 - Humor and negotiating



Vignette 2: Lunch on the Expressway



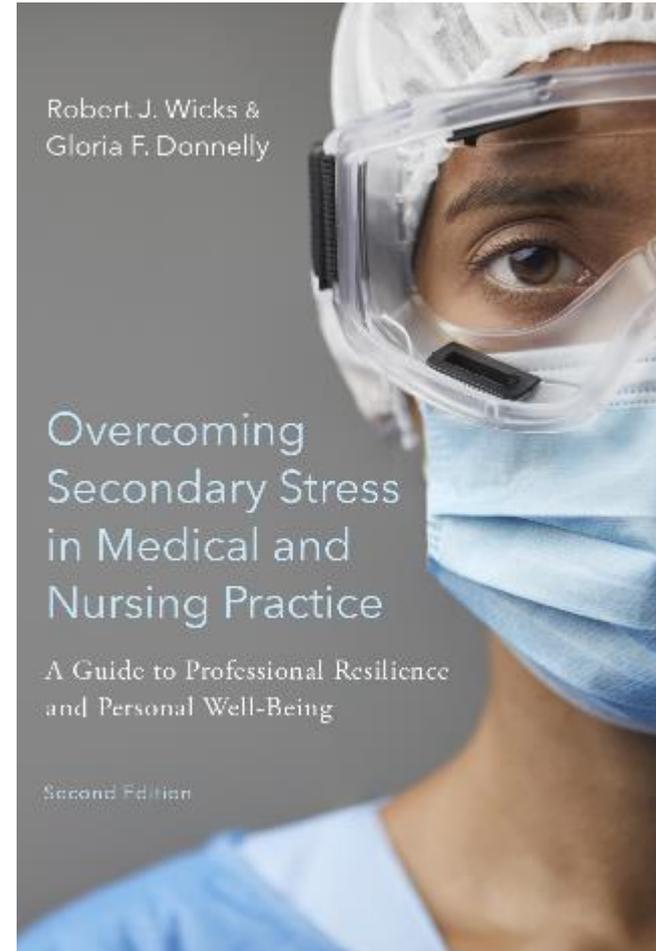
Considering Lunch on the Expressway

- Should the clinician enter the patients' context?
- Should the clinician suppress spontaneity?
- What is the relationship between specific symptomatology and humor?
- How does humor build human connection and improve relationships?
- Can we purposively introduce humor in clinical settings? Does sending in the clowns work?

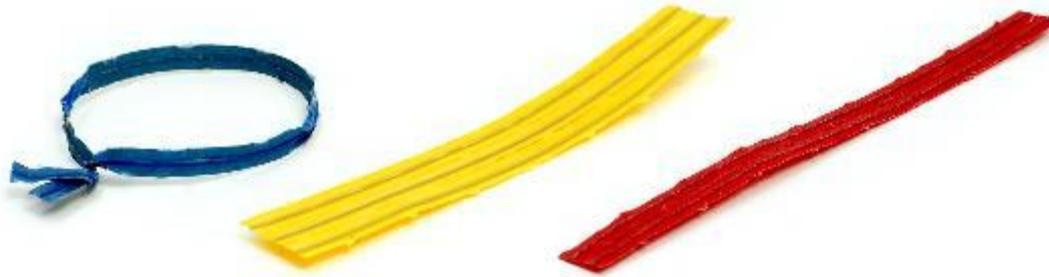


Large Studies on Humor

- A 7- year prospective study of sense of humor and mortality in an adult county population: the HUNT-2 study. Svevak S, Romundstad S, Homan J. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*. 2010; 40 (2): 125-46
- More than 66,000 in sample. Humor is a factor in reaching to age 65!
- An overview of the nature of humor and its healing properties in Overcoming Secondary Stress in Medical and Nursing Practice. 2021, Oxford University Press.



Vignette 3: The Twisty on the Bag

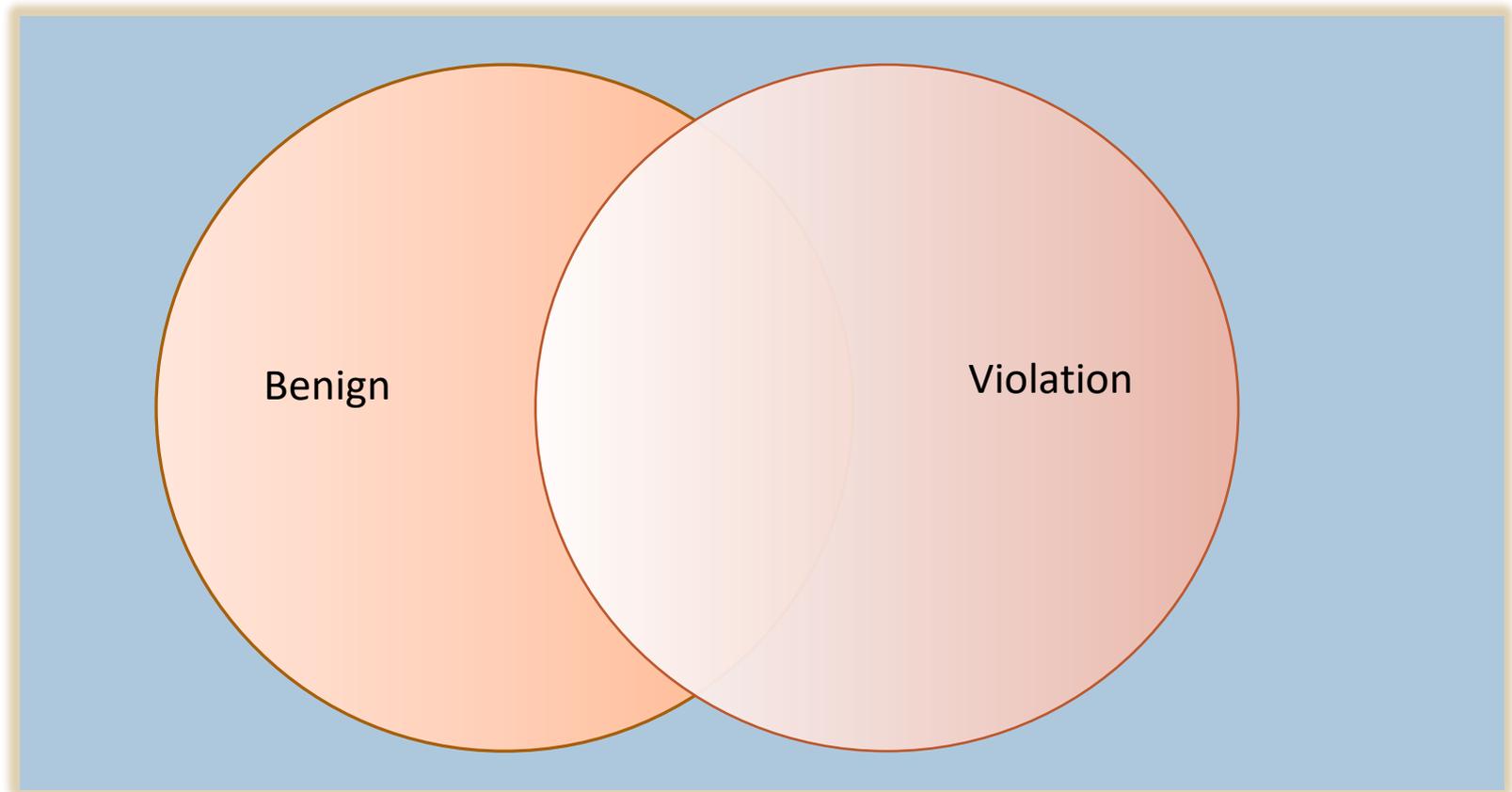


Considering the Twisty!

- When the practitioner faces an extreme stressor
- Conceptualizing clinical situations humorously
- The concept of gallows humor
- Gallows humor and the preservation of dignity
- How practitioners use humor to manage work stress



Humor as Violation and Bi-sociation



Humor in Work Environments: Issues and Questions?

- What is a “humor orientation?”
- Is it possible to have no sense of humor or humor orientation that is so low, it is impossible to appreciate and or use humor?
- Can we assess “sense of humor?”
- Can humor orientation be learned?
- Can humor occur and potentiate patient and staff relationships?
- Humor and Culture – do some cultures suppress humor as a healthy strategy or use humor in negative ways?
- What types of humor are most effective in promoting healthy work environments?

Situations that Elicit Humorous Coping (Wanzer, 2005)

Death/deteriorating health

Difficult patients, difficult colleagues

Work relationships

General Stress/Bad Days/Whelm

Patient and Family Anxiety

General Patient Care – Lunch over the
Expressway

Mistakes

Miscellaneous Nursing Situations – funny
meetings, lunch events, breaks etc.

Prayer for Good Humor

by St. Thomas More

Grant me, O Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest.
Grant me a healthy body, and the necessary good humor to maintain it.

Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and that doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil, but rather finds the means to put things back in their place.

Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumblings, sighs and laments, nor excess of stress, because of that obstructing thing called "I."

Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor.

Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others.

References

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