

Clowning around is good for brain health

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Dr Lenisa Brandao, Atlantic Fellow at GBHI. Credit: Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College and the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) are broadening the discussion on the importance of art for brain health which gives space for perspectives that may help change the narrative on how we view older adults and promote their active participation in life.

Dr. Lenisa Brandao is an Atlantic Fellow at GBHI and studies the application of the arts of 'narrative and clowning' in interventions applied to promote the enhancement and recovery of cognitive-communicative skills of older adults, with and without neurological

disorders.

Clowning involves the whole body and engages the emotions without speech. The use of humour improves the quality of life for patients with dementia, reduces tensions and settles agitated emotions, while improving patients' social bonds.

Dr. Brandao, a speech and [language](#) therapist said: "Clowning gives you freedom to use more ways of expressing yourself; you get to express emotions through gestural movements of your body – which can be very helpful for people whose verbal skills are impaired, through dementia or a stroke."

"Clowning can be a medium of expression and empowerment for anyone interested in learning about their selves, using multiple channels of communication and shifting their perspectives on failure. It can also be a medium for promoting the critical education of health professionals, as it provides a context for experiencing horizontal and empathetic relationships," she continued.

Clowning has been extensively practiced in health settings through the visit of clown professionals in hospitals and geriatric centres. Dr. Brandao proposes that active clowning be practiced by diverse populations, such as older adults who survive stroke and those who live with dementia."

As a Speech and Language Therapist, her latest work has concentrated in promoting the [brain health](#) of [older adults](#) who survive stroke and live with a condition called 'aphasia', a language impairment caused by brain damage. Due to language difficulties, aphasia provokes idiosyncratic experiences and loneliness. Language is no longer fully available. However, emotions are there and nonverbal abilities are usually preserved. Communicating functionally and experiencing well-being

during communication is essential for this population.

"Communicating is more than using words and sentences. Discourse involves the whole body, especially gestures and facial expressions. People living with aphasia should be encouraged to use their strengths. And that is when therapeutic clowning comes into play; empowering individuals who are highly stigmatised in society. Empathy and nonverbal communication play a huge role in this process. Clowning provides a context of freedom to use all channels of communication while promoting self-acceptance," she concluded.

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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