

MEDIA RELEASE



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Humour is no laughing matter!

The place of humour in promoting good health will come in for serious scrutiny at the 12th National Rural Health Conference in Adelaide on 7-10 April.

David Bell, Visiting Psychiatrist at Moree and Narrabri, will present findings from a world-first randomised controlled trial to understand the role of humour in therapeutic engagement in an acute psychiatric setting. Results showed that if a clinician tried to generate humour, engagement with the patient often increased. The increase was most significant for clinicians who had known the patient for less than two weeks. This suggests that the use of humour in therapeutic engagement might be most critical in the first few days of admission as compared with later points in time. David says there is vast potential for benefit from using humour in therapy for mental illness. His presentation *Humour and acute psychology* will explore some of the possible applications.

Mary-Jane Honner will share the story of two HealthPlays touring with the Royal Flying Doctor Service in South Australia and the Northern Territory. The plays use comedy to deliver health messages about diabetes and depression. Diabetes is Australia's fastest growing chronic disease with one person diagnosed every six minutes, and many cases of type 2 diabetes still undiagnosed. The trend is more concerning in country areas, where rates of mortality as a result of diabetes are two to four times higher than in the city. Mary-Jane is a strong advocate of humour for health: she says, "It is proven that a good giggle is better than a bar of chocolate for reducing stress! A hearty belly laugh will produce a nice six pack! One hundred smiles is equivalent to slogging away on the treadmill for 15 minutes!" Mary-Jane's presentation *What soap is to the body, laughter is to good health* will report that as well as providing a good laugh the HealthPlays gave their audiences greater awareness of how to manage these conditions and minimise associated risks.

Tarja Martin's presentation *Promoting health – using your arts 'skill set' in a rural health promotion* will propose acting as the 'secret weapon' in a health professional's promotion armoury. Tarja says once the professional is immersed in the character, humour becomes the important driver for the health message. Tarja will introduce delegates to 'the Dame', a popular character with old and young alike, and a versatile promoter of a range of health messages, including healthy eating, literacy, active ageing, sexual health and falls prevention. Tarja says that hiding health education in dramatic humour is just like hiding the vegies in children's meals – good for them but they don't know it!

It seems that a key health message to come out of the Conference will be: Laugh early, laugh often!

For more information the 12th Conference, including the detailed program, go to www.ruralhealth.org.au



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