

# The Wizardry of Roz

FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter

A newsletter for people who want to add more humor into healthcare.

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## WELCOME TO FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter

FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter is a somewhat regular newsletter from FUNsulting, etc. whose mission is to redefine excellence in healthcare through humor. Each edition includes fun, funny *and* practical articles and resources which will enhance the humor potential in healthcare without sacrificing the integrity of the care that is delivered. Remember, a laugh a day gathers no moss (or something like that). Enjoy!

## FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

### *I Could Use Some HumoRelief*

For several weeks, I've been battling an illness with mystery symptoms of unknown origin. It's as if I *nearly* caught the flu, or maybe skipped the flu and went straight to the side effects. Have you ever looked up a common illness and below the primary symptoms, you saw this, "Some people may also experience...?" That's me. I've got the B-list symptoms that don't seem to point to any particular illness. I've got a headache, stiff neck, sore jaw, indigestion, and muscle aches. But no congestion, nausea, or runny nose, and nothing green, yellow, or oozing. I feel like I've been shopping at the Symptom Dollar Store – my symptoms just don't add up.

After contacting my physician for the gazillionth time, I realized that I'm just not a good patient. I can't stand being sick and have no tolerance for wayward symptoms. I think it might be a man thing. For as long as I can remember, I've complained about the slightest discomfort. A hangnail can put me in bed for a week. I remember one of my hospice colleagues, Sister Catherine Higley, telling me, "I avoid the office when you're sick. You're miserable to be around!" She always was blunt.

The feature article in this issue of FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter illustrates how my friend Roz Trieber is coping with

*her* illness. She is currently receiving hospice care for pancreatic cancer and the difference between our coping styles is dramatic. I drive myself to the ER when I find an ingrown hair. Roz is putting “Do Not Enter” stickers on her back side in preparation for a visit to the gastroenterologist. I’ll be honest. Some days, I want to smack her and say, “Hey show a little discouragement now and again, won’t you? This fun attitude is annoying.”

But deep down, I know that Roz gets it. She’s not skipping around telling everyone she is “superfantastic” or “wonderlicious.” That would be as sincere as a bad toupee. Instead, she has a genuinely positive outlook and looks forward to the joy she may find in every moment of her life. I believe she demonstrates how we hope we will be when we’re in her situation. But it’s not as easy as Roz makes it look.

Most of us can’t cope with adversity because we haven’t learned to cope with smooth sailing. You see, Roz is positive when she’s well, when she’s sick, and when she’s in between. She practices it every day. We, on the other hand, can’t expect to go through life grumpy and then wake up one day with a serious illness and say, “I think I’ll be positive from now on.” It just doesn’t work that way.

As I sit here wondering when my symptoms will improve, I realize that being discontent with this particular moment in time means that I’m missing seconds, minutes, or even hours of my life. And I’ll never get those back. If, on the other hand, I try to enjoy this moment with a bit of joy, humor, or Roz-inspired optimism, I can emerge from my over inflated troubles in a better place than when they started.

Thanks, Roz.

## **POSITIVE RESULTS**

Dr. Lee Berk, DrPH, MPH, a psychoneuroimmunologist at Loma Linda University in California recently completed a study which showed that diabetics with hypertension benefited from regular laughter. In the study, one group of patients engaged in 30 minutes of laughter per day. Those patients experienced a 26% increase in their HDL (good) cholesterol compared to a 3% increase in the control group.

Studies like this continue to reinforce the idea that laughter *is* the best medicine. Just don’t tell the hospital finance office or they’ll find a way to bill us for it.

## THE BEST MEDICINE

My friend and fellow healthcare humorist David Glickman ([www.DavidGlickman.com](http://www.DavidGlickman.com)) sent me the following patient comments during colonoscopies. The original source is unknown.

- “Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?”
- “Hey Doc, let me know if you find my dignity.”
- “You know, in Arkansas, we’re now legally married.”
- “You put your left hand in; you take your left hand out...”
- “Hey! Now I know how a Muppet feels!”
- “Could you write a note for my wife saying that my head is not up here?”

## HUMOR REFERRALS

### What Does Ron Read?

I have very eclectic reading tastes but I always appreciate well-written humor. Here are some of my favorite humor writers:

- Bill Bryson, author of *A Walk in the Woods* and *I’m a Stranger Here Myself*.
- Anne Lamott, author of *Bird by Bird* and *Traveling Mercies*.
- Steve Martin, comedian and author of *Born Standing Up*.
- Dave Barry, author of *Boogers are My Beat* and *Dave Barry Turns 50*
- Craig Wilson, columnist of “Final Word” in *USA Today*
- Ellen DeGeneres, comedian and author of *My Point...And I Do Have One*.

## DISCHARGE PLANS

### *The Wizardry of Roz*

On May 27, 2009, Roz Trieber did a photo shoot for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Now you should know that Roz is no supermodel. In fact, appearance-wise, she could be a librarian. She’s no celebrity either unless you count the fame she enjoys in her doctor’s waiting room. Basically, Roz is a middle aged woman coping with cancer. But what makes Roz extraordinary, and the perfect subject for the Komen photo shoot, is her attitude. She’s Lucille Ball, Patch Adams, and Norman Cousins all rolled up into one.

Roz began her career in the medical technology field. Then in 1989, she received a master's degree in Community Health Education with an emphasis on wellness and stress management. As part of her studies, she became interested in the power of humor in stress management. So, she attended the Humor Project's conference in Saratoga Springs, NY and joined the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. The rest, as they say, is history. She became a humor educator at Towson University and began speaking to community organizations about the benefits of humor.

In 2002, Roz was diagnosed with breast cancer. In typical Roz fashion, she approached this challenge as just one more bump, so to speak, on the road of life. She told the surgeon she didn't have time for cancer because she had too much to do. And when she was being prepped for her lumpectomy, the nurse raised the sheet to find two clown noses strategically placed on each breast. It broke the tension for Roz and kept everyone's spirits high.

Five years later, Roz was again diagnosed with cancer. This time it was in her pancreas. She was "numb" for the first few days after hearing the diagnosis but then she quickly regressed (in a good way) to her normal state of mind. While in the hospital, she handed out clown noses and copies of her book, *Live Life Laughing* to the other patients.

She said, "Helping other people made *me* feel better."

That's the extraordinary attitude of Roz Trieber. She is simply joy personified.

After a difficult round of treatments, Roz's condition improved for a year or so. Then in February of 2009, the cancer returned throughout her abdomen. She tried eight days of radiation but told her physician that the treatment was killing her faster than the cancer. She stopped the radiation and opted for hospice care instead. She desired a better quality of life for whatever time she had left.

Most of us would have probably thrown in the towel at that point. But Roz continued to find ways to have a positive impact on those around her. One day she wore a clown nose to her doctor's appointment. People asked where they could get one. Roz proudly replied, "From me." She sold seven of them.

I visited Roz in April and the first thing she said was, "How can I help *you*?" Now there's a role reversal.

Roz was her usual perky and talkative self, and she told me some great stories of the trials and triumphs of her illness. For instance, she had requested home visits from two rabbis and a Christian chaplain. She said, “I wanted to see all the different perspectives out there.”

Whether it’s spiritual “shopping,” or selling clown noses, that’s the way Roz sees the world. You don’t have to take what life gives you lying down.

It’s a shame that most of us can’t approach the challenges in our lives like Roz. In fact, most of us don’t even know someone like her. But if we did, I can guarantee the interaction with that person will inspire you to reframe your point of view forever. Roz has such a gift.

I told Roz to imagine that her name was listed as an entry in the encyclopedia. “What would it say,” I asked.

She said, “It would say, ‘Roz Trieber loves to inspire people and make them laugh. Her mission is to live life laughing.’”

Amen.

**QUOTE:** Serious illness doesn’t bother me for long because I am too inhospitable a host. – Albert Schweitzer

**BACK QUOTE:** When I was a boy, the Dead Sea was only sick. – George Burns

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