

### Humor Doulas

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#### Abstract

Laughter at professional health care conferences may be the best medicine.  
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Recently, I enjoyed the opportunity to perform the keynote address at the annual conference of the American Association of Therapeutic Humor. Now, therapeutic humorists know how to enjoy conferences. What a bunch of clowns—literally!

Having planned, presented at, and attended many health-care-related conferences for over 20 years, both the similarities and differences I noted struck me. The primary objectives of, say, a "prenatal nursing conference" and a "humor conference" are the same. Experts share the latest educational information available. Colleagues gather from all over the world to network and exchange ideas. And, of course, continuing education units are earned. The secondary objectives are notably similar as well. Soaking in the hotel hot tub. Dining with coworkers while marveling at yet another remarkable "saucy" way to disguise a chicken breast. Not to mention a part of the conference every bit as mandatory as any CEU—shopping!

So, what are the differences? Laughter—hooting, howling, constant chortling, giggling, guffawing, and being "tickled 'til you trickle."

I dare say we are taking ourselves entirely too seriously. "But," you argue, "there is nothing amusing about PIH or DIC and, after all, we have complicated physiologic and socioeconomic conditions to discuss." Well, psychoneuroimmunology is no "easy read" either. Humorists take subjects like pediatric oncology very seriously; but, as Dr. Ann Weeks urges and I witnessed, they take *themselves* lightly. Before each morning session, conference attendees weren't plodding through the exhibit areas, methodically licking the frosting from their continental breakfasts. They arose early and practically inhaled those pastries whole in order to participate in scheduled morning laughter exercises. They wore funny hats, silly buttons, and red noses. They carried purses shaped like huge hands. (Get it? *Handbags*!) Soon the hotel wait staff were touting wigs and had cleverly renamed the luncheon specials. "Funny Boned Fish Fillets" and "Humorless Chocolate Cakes."

I feel comfortable challenging you to consider adding more laughter into your daily routine. After all, if you're reading a humor column in a prestigious academic journal, not only do you "get it," but also Lamaze International clearly recognizes and supports the personal and professional benefits of lightening up.

If you would like to share resources on ways to add humor to the work we do. Contact me. Better yet, stop by my exhibit table at the next Lamaze International annual conference and pick up a red nose—your official "Humor Doula" designation! Perhaps we can conceive of ways to support and deliver more laughter. We may even hold our first meeting in the hot tub!

