

# The McGill University Health Centre Sends in the Clowns

By Rene Bruemmer, The Gazette May 4, 2012



Jérôme Arous (left), and Nimrod Eisenberg, two professionally trained medical clowns from Israel are touring Canadian hospitals to demonstrate the effects of humor on health.

MONTREAL - The McGill University Health Centre is bringing in the clowns to see if they can help women conceive.

Two professionally trained, university accredited medical clowns from Israel will present a conference at the MUHC's reproductive centre Thursday morning about the link between clowning and fertility rates, then mingle with willing patients in the waiting room. Medical clowns are common in Israel and present in most hospitals, in the belief laughter can help heal and alleviate stress.

“With big red noses and a comedic disposition, clowns Jérôme Arous and Nimrod Eisenberg will be making hopeful future parents smile and laugh with the goal of improving the chances their embryonic transfers will take,” the MUHC said in a statement.

McGill officials were unable to clarify exactly what it was the clowns do to help women make babies, (“Clowning,” said one doctor) but the theory is based in science. In a small study of 219 women undergoing IVF treatments (in which eggs are removed from the uterus, fertilized and

replaced in the hope they will attach to the uterus walls), it was found 36 per cent of women entertained for 15 minutes by a medical clown following the implantation of the embryo became pregnant, compared with 20 per cent for those who were not. The study, led by Dr. Shevach Friedler of the Assaf Harofeh Medical Centre in Israel, was published in the journal Fertility and Sterility.

As there has been no confirmed link between emotional stress and successful IVF, it's not known whether decreased stress levels were to account for the improved fertility rates.

The MUHC isn't planning to institute clown-aided fertility treatments on a regular basis in the near future, said Dr. Hananel Holzer, medical director of the MUHC reproductive centre. Nor does it intend to inflict exuberant red-nosed clowns on unsuspecting hopeful mothers Thursday, he said. But it doesn't hurt to listen, he said.

The MUHC and other medical institutions in Montreal have long used clowns as part of medical therapy for children and adults, particularly through the Montreal-based Dr. Clown organization.

The touring clowns, Jérôme Arous and Nimrod Eisenberg, graduated with bachelors of arts degrees in theatre and therapy for medical clowns from Haifa University in Israel, and continued their studies in theatre school in Paris. Haifa University is now creating a Masters program in medical clowning.

The clowns, sponsored in part by the Consulate General of Israel and Quebec's Ministry of International Relations, are giving a series of conferences and workshops at hospitals in Quebec City, Montreal, Chicoutimi and Halifax.

rbruemmer@montrealgazette.com

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette