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Interview with Lili Castro: Clowning as a transformation tool in health

EDITORIAL / INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

ANA CRISTINA NUNES DE GUSMÃO¹ 
ANA.GUSMAO@FELUMA.ORG.BR

INTERVIEWEE

LÍLIAN CRISTINA ABREU CASTRO¹ 
LILIAN.CASTRO@CIENCIASMEDICASMG.EDU.BR

CONCEPTION

RAQUEL DE CARVALHO LANA¹ 
RAQUEL.CAMPELO@CIENCIASMEDICASMG.EDU.BR

TRANSLATION TO ENGLISH

DOUGLAS LAMOUNIER DE ALMEIDA¹ 
DOUGLAS.ALMEIDA@CIENCIASMEDICASMG.EDU.BR

¹ FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS MÉDICAS DE MINAS
GERAIS – BELO HORIZONTE, MG, BRASIL

Lílian Cristina Abreu Castro, stage name **Lili Castro**, is a teacher, researcher, clown, and actress. She is a PhD student and holds a Master's degree in Performing Arts from the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro - UNIRIO. She is a History of Culture and Art specialist from the Federal University of Minas Gerais - UFMG. She is the author of the book "Clowns: multiplicity, performance and hybridism" and other publications. She has been teaching arts in the Medicine course at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Minas Gerais - CMMG since 2021 and is a professor in the Postgraduate course in hospital clowning at PUCPR/EPAH. She also teaches at the Escola Livre de Palhaço - ESLIPA/RJ. She collaborates with the ARTE&SAÚDE research group, which relates Theater and Medical Education at UNICAMP, with the CIRCUS group, which researches circus language at FEF/UNICAMP, and with the ARTEFEM group of PPGAC UNIRIO. He has been working in the Performing Arts area since 1997, participating in several national and international events and festivals.



[Ana Gusmão] Greetings to all! It is with great joy that we begin another interview in our Art and Culture section. Today, we are in a special place: Casa Circo Gamarra, located in Santa Tereza. This is a vibrant environment that breathes culture and art. We are privileged to welcome Lili Castro, a professor at the School of Medical Sciences. We are immensely grateful, Lili, for accepting our invitation to share your journey and ideas. To begin, could you tell us a little about your journey and how you transitioned from the world of clowning to Medical Sciences?

[Lili Castro] Of course! I am an actress, clown, writer, and teacher. My career in the performing arts began in 1997, when I started as a playwright, writing plays. Over time, I also became an actress, and since then I

have never strayed from this universe, especially from theater, which has always been present in my life. I started teaching in 2002, initially to children and later to elementary and high school students. Throughout my career, I became closer to the circus and became a clown, dedicating myself intensely to this art. In 2009, I went to Rio de Janeiro, where I worked for 12 years, mainly with the circus, and I started working as a clown in hospitals. During this period, I participated in an NGO that performed interventions in hospitals until 2020, close to the beginning of the pandemic. Upon returning to Belo Horizonte, I was invited by the School of Medical Sciences to teach about hospital clowning, aiming to apply this knowledge in the training of medical students. I started my activities at college in 2021, working with first and second-semester classes.

Ana Gusmão: Considering that clowning is a vast universe, how do you see this aspect within the context of healthcare? What special aspects does clowning bring to the hospital environment?

[Lili Castro] *It is truly wonderful! We have observed several artistic interventions in hospitals, but clowning has a unique strength in this context. It introduces an element of joy and relaxation into environments often marked by pain, sadness, and anguish. Clowning provides, even if momentarily, relief for patients, companions, and healthcare teams, offering a different perspective on the hospitalization experience. Through playful and interactive activities, we can remind patients of what they like, their memories, and their joys. The interactive nature of clowning is essential; each interaction is different, as it depends on the preferences and expressions of each patient. This active approach allows patients to become participants and not mere spectators, promoting a transformation in their posture and well-being. It is gratifying to observe how, when we enter a room, we often find people sad and prostrate, but with our actions, we see these same people sit up, get up, and gain new vitality.*

[Ana Gusmão] There must be many exciting moments along the way...

[Lili Castro] Many, without a doubt!

[Ana Gusmão] Reflecting on your entire experience and the openness you provide to people, we realize there is an exchange of love in this process. From what I know, clowns must be genuine in their performance, which requires true exposure. What benefits do you believe this experience brings to healthcare professionals and students when they put themselves in this role and interact with patients?

[Lili Castro] *That is an excellent question. For a long time, in Brazil and around the world, professional artists have been conducting clown visits to hospitals. In Brazil, this practice has been institutionalized in groups for about 35 years. The benefits of this activity, from the patient's point of view, are well documented. However, what we do in Medical Sciences is pioneering, as it aims not only to benefit patients but also to contribute to the training of future doctors. Interacting with patients allows students to connect with them on an emotional and social level. Visits take place in hospitals 100% covered by the SUS, providing students with an understanding of the diversity of the Brazilian population and the challenges of social inequalities they will encounter throughout their careers. Another significant contribution is that students learn to observe. What makes one person laugh can be very different from what makes another laugh. Therefore, when entering a room, students need to understand the cultural universe and cognitive capacities of each patient, adjusting their approach according to individual needs. This development of observation and listening is a notable gain. In addition, practicing clowning develops empathy, social skills, and communication. Students not only improve their soft skills but*

also learn to listen and relate more meaningfully to the community.

These encounters also help them to understand what the routine of someone hospitalized is like, including their fears and complaints. The clown, in his performance, allows students to observe and understand these dynamics, leading them to consider the patient as a complete human being, and not just as a clinical case.

[Ana Gusmão] Without a doubt, it is a perspective that we need to cultivate, not only in this context but in our daily lives. Thank you very much, Lili.

[Lili Castro] Thank you.

[Ana Gusmão] I want to express my gratitude not only for the interview but for your work. I believe that soon we will see the impact of your actions on our society.

[Lili Castro] Thank you, Ana.

[Ana Gusmão] I thank you all and see you in the next interview.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Interview given to Ana Gusmão, on June 5, 2023, at the Feluma Theater, for the Art and Culture Project / Extension and Health Education Magazine of the School of Medical Sciences of Minas Gerais

interview video

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English translation: Douglas Lamounier de Almeida¹
