

FOOD BASKET IS WHERE YOU GET THE . . .

**Humor Found  
Safety Valve for  
Hospital Patients**

London (Science Service) — That peculiar human trait, laughter, is a "safety valve" for hospitalized patients. Humor provides not only an outlet for hostility and discontent in the hospital setting, but it also allows the patients to entertain, reassure, and communicate with one another.

Thus, laughter has an important social function, according to Dr. Rose L. Coser, reporting in the English social science journal Human Relations.

**Owls Brands of Humor**  
Institutionalized patients, like many other groups, such as soldiers and secretaries and even nationalities, have their own brands of humor. The jocularity of patients, Dr. Coser said, can be understood in terms of their anxiety, submission to hospital authority, and the rigid routine.

A typical feeling reported to her by one patient was: "I was very apprehensive. I was frightened to death. I did not know what to expect."

The humor serves as a means to ward off danger, to rebel against authority, and to obtain relief from mechanical routine.

Much of the humor takes the form of griping. For example, a patient told Dr. Coser, "Dinner was no good; what I cook is better." A few minutes later, however, she told a fellow patient, "Those hamburgers today were as hard as rocks; if I'd bounced them against the wall they'd come right back." The patients responded with laughter.

**Has purpose**  
This type of jocular gripe might not tickle another group, but it has its purpose in the hospital setting, Dr. Coser said. ". . . it helps patients to regain their identity through collective triumph over their weakness and at the same time to release their grudges in 'substitute complaints'."

Dr. Coser concluded that a "story well told, which, in a few minutes, entertains, reassures, conveys information, releases tension, and draws people more closely together, may have more to contribute than a carefully planned lecture . . . toward the security of the frightened sick."

Dr. Coser is a sociologist at McLean Hospital, Belmont, Mass.

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