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Lights and Camera Take Action

What do you get when you cross Ansel Adams, Cecil B. Demille and William Osler?

It sounds like the lead to a joke from the turn of the last century but its ‘punchline’, Seema Marwaha, is certainly a modern marvel.

Seema is a resident fellow with General Internal Medicine at UHN, an award-winning filmmaker, and recently completed a photography internship with National Geographic.

“All of these things are who I am and the one thing that unifies it all is that they’re things that I love,” Seema says.

Don’t just tell me, show me

Her role with the Centre for Innovation in Complex Care (CICC) combines Seema’s passions – using her medical knowledge and storytelling skills to convey the patient experience to her residents.

Asking a patient to get blood testing or have imaging taken is as simple as checking a box. That simplicity makes it hard for a new physician to imagine the impact that comes with every swoop of the pen.

Seema’s residents were assigning patients a lot of follow up under tight timelines so she found a way to show them how arduous follow up tests could be. She sent her students on the equivalent of a hospital scavenger hunt – asking her young, able-bodied students to navigate the hospital under the timelines given to their aged, ill patients and send her photos from each location.

“None of the groups could get to all of the locations within an hour; some couldn’t even *find* the rooms they’d been sending patients to.”

No story better exemplifies her mantra: “Don’t just tell me, show me”.

Seema’s in the midst of creating a series of videos portraying medicine from the patient’s point of view. Viewers can watch a video and understand impact; this leaves a more lasting impression than hearing a lesson in a lecture or reading it in a text book. The goal is for patient experience videos to demonstrate the entirety of the health care journey from the eyes of a patient.

Using her filmmaking, Seema tells compelling stories that will change perceptions and, ultimately, impact behaviour.

One of Seema's recent films won the Ivey School of Business' Global Impact award for its powerful hand hygiene message. 'It just makes sense' – a message that UHN has been striving to spread as we continue to work towards higher hand hygiene compliance – is not just written, but demonstrated in this two-minute video that was co-created by the CICC's Erica Merman and Victoria Leong.

“Anyone on a unit that has ever experienced a hand-hygiene related death immediately gets it. So the challenge is taking that lightbulb moment and translating it into something that moves everyone.”

**** video**** (www.vimeo.com/seema/handwashing)

Two worlds collide

The patient experience and hand hygiene videos aren't the only way that Seema's medical and film expertise intersect.

“In medicine, you have this huge knowledge base of complex physiology, access to journals and other technological resources and we have to filter all of that information down and explain things to patients on a level they can understand. Editing is the same; I need to reduce hours and hours and hours of footage to tell a story in a short period of time, one that still resonates emotionally with the audience.”

Seema admits that filtering heaps of information into something manageable has made her a better physician and filmmaker. As she continues to blur the lines between these two worlds, we can expect more videos that light the bulb in each of us.