



# A vital history of medical photography

By Andrew Kaszowski

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then there were a million things learned at Mount Sinai Hospital's medical photography lecture on Sunday, May 7.

Registered Biomedical Photographer Ken Meats, manager of Graphics and New Media at the hospital, presented a short history of the use of photography in medicine. The event was part of the 10th annual CONTACT Photography Festival, a Toronto-wide exhibition held each May. The lecture accompanied an exhibit in the Mount Sinai Hospital lobby that featured photography by Kevin Van Paassen of The Globe and Mail from the award-winning series "Mount Hope: Life and Death at the Hospital."

Van Paassen joined Meats during the lecture to describe his experience spending eight weeks in 2005 at Mount Sinai Hospital – along with journalist Ian Brown and graphics editor



**Registered Biomedical Photographer Ken Meats**

Richard Johnson – to create the series. He described the drama of life at the hospital and the personal challenges faced in portraying the emotional stories of the hospital's patients, and the staff who care for them at the bedside and through research.

Meats traced the evolution of medical photography from its roots – as far back as the great Renaissance artist-scientists like Leonardo DaVinci,

who merged an understanding of human anatomy with gifted artistic ability long before the development of photography. Meats explained that in early medicine, the need arose for specialized illustrative assistants when investigators were not able to represent their work accurately due to differing observation and graphic skills.

With the advent of photography in the 1850s, documentation of medical work changed again. Many early photogra-

phers had an artistic background and there was not a standard consistency of the work they produced. Meats explained that by the early 20th century, medical photography developed as its own specialty, with specific training and guidelines. This raised the professional standards for the documentation of medical procedures and specimens.

"Biophotography in general has advanced to many sophisticated techniques and applications," says Meats. "Medical photographers need to be able to talk to doctors and other scientists at a professional level and keep a standardized view for doctors to be able to compare findings from one patient to the next, or from one procedure to the next."

Meats has an extensive photography background, with 30 years in medical photography at several hospitals in Canada and at Saudi Arabian National Guard Hospital in Riyadh. He began working at Mount Sinai Hospital in 1988 as a research photographer and watched bio-

photography at the hospital evolve from mainly clinical documentation to contributing to medical instruction. The greatest change Meats has experienced has been the development of digital technology.

"In the 1990s, while the majority of our work was still to make computer slides for teaching within the hospital, we were slowly developing a skill set in the design of multimedia presentations on the computer," says Meats. "The department's name changed from 'Instructional Media' to the 'Image Centre' with the idea that we were developing expertise in digital imaging at the hospital."

Today, Meats' department at Mount Sinai has been renamed 'Graphics and New Media,' reflecting the areas of specialty that he views as essential elements in the future of medical teaching – including Flash presentation, graphic design, and video editing.

As Meats concluded in his lecture, "the image will always have an important place in medicine, no matter what technology the future has in store."

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