

Presentations Skills

Inevitably working in hospital means at some point someone else more senior will make you do a presentation....there is just no escaping it. The temptation is to dust off an old presentation, change the date on it and viola we are good to go. If you are going for an important interview would you just put on any old clothes? If you are going on a first date would you just wander straight from work without considering your make up? No? Then maybe we should change the way that we approach presenting.

Every presentation can be broken down into 3 parts; The Story, The Media and The Delivery. Only by working hard on each of these components can we create inspiring presentations. Below are a few tips on each category that might help get you started.

The Story – turn ‘What’ into ‘So What’

We all love stories and the power of anecdote is so great that no matter how boring the material is, if it is in story form there is suspense. Medicine lends itself to story telling because often the story we are telling is that of a patients journey through the hospital. Remember however that studies have shown that attention drops after 20 minutes in a lecture. So your story should be like an elevator pitch where you have 20 floors to convince people of your key message, so that when they reach the top floor they turn to you and say ‘tell me more’. So know what your key message is and why people should be interested in it.

The Media – Illustrate don’t Annotate

‘A picture is worth a thousand words’.....but it has to be the right picture. Slides are a distraction from what you are trying to say; words on a slide doubly so. If words are on a slide then people will read them. 2 quick ways to improve your slide deck is to cut and paste all the words into the notes section of power point/keynote and blow up your image to take the whole screen. Remember your slides are not as essential as your message. Delete your data slides. To everyone else they are like a ‘where’s wally’ picture with the essential information hidden somewhere in the picture and just not enough time to find it. Think of other ways of presenting that data so that people can get more out of it.

The Delivery – Perform don’t Read

The last time we had someone read a story to us is when we were children; and at some point we told our parents to stop because we had learnt to read by ourselves. The temptations is to have the information in front of us so we can read it so that we do not forget what we were going to say. Presenting is scary and even after all these years I get butterflies in my stomach every time I have to present. The only way to get away from reading is to rehearse, rehearse rehearse. When you see a shakespearean play it is not the first time the actors have seen their script, and they certainly are not reading the script while they act. They have dedicated endless hours into getting the play right, and our colleagues deserve the same.

So now it is time to make that change....

Anu Mascarenhas
Education registrar