Keynote focuses on photographer’s positive images of children with diseases

Forget the images you have seen of children in medical texts. One photographer has refocused his lens to capture the beauty of individual children with visible diseases and genetic abnormalities.

Former fashion photographer Rick Guidotti’s keynote address at the National Conference & Exhibition reminded pediatricians that there often is more than meets the eye, as he shared his unique photographic work.

Guidotti explained his unanticipated journey from fashion photographer to founder and CEO of a nonprofit group called Positive Exposure, which uses the visual arts to show the beauty in human diversity and change public perceptions of those with differences.

He had traveled the world taking photos of supermodels like Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer for renowned clients such as Yves Saint Laurent, Revlon and Marie Claire. A chance encounter with a girl who had albinism prompted Guidotti to shift people’s perceptions away from the negative side. His subjects now are children and adults with genetic, physical, cognitive and behavioral differences.

“I didn’t see beauty and I still don’t see beauty on the cover of magazines,” Guidotti told the audience.

When Guidotti spotted the girl with albinism, he was mesmerized. “I never met a model who looked like that,” he said. Curious, he searched for information about the condition in medical textbooks. What he found disturbed him: images of patients with black bars across their faces, sometimes standing naked up against a wall. “I quickly put the medical textbook back,” he said.

He then sought out the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH) to see if he could partner with them to show the world the beauty in albinism.

Initially they told him to “get lost,” fearing his photos would be sensational and negative. After much persistence on Guidotti’s part, NOAH...
finally agreed. His photo series was published in the June 1998 issue of \textit{LIFE} magazine as a cover story titled “Redefining Beauty.”

The reaction was overwhelmingly positive, and Guidotti began partnering with other organizations. During his address, he shared stunning photos he has taken of children from around the world with conditions such as Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome and Marfan syndrome. The photos all show kids being kids — no feeding tubes, no wheelchairs, no despair.

He also talked about a project called Faces Redefining the Art of Medical Education (FRAME), which gives a voice to those living with differences. FRAME is an online medical library of videos of kids and families who present the basic characteristics of a variety of genetic, physical and behavioral conditions. The videos are used to educate medical students to see patients not only as a disease or disability but as human beings first.

Guidotti summed up the goal of Positive Exposure by saying, “Change how you see. See how you change.”
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