Trash to treasure: memories from the ICU

A striking mural that hangs at Toronto General Hospital of the University Health Network has an interesting story behind it, which Tilda Shalof explains.

The more than 10,000 tabs, lids, pins, stoppers, pipettes, syringes, levers, screws and connectors that make up this mural all were used to deliver patient care. After their one-off purpose, these pieces are usually discarded. During my 28 year career as a nurse at Toronto General Hospital, each time I pulled or tugged, twisted, flipped, snapped, or popped off one of these bits of plastic, I saved it. To me, embedded in them are the many stories, memories, and moments I’ve had with patients over the years.

As the years went by, my collection grew, but I had no idea how to turn this trash into art. Enter Vanessa Herman, Toronto Artist and friend, who suggested a mosaic. We discussed designs, but eventually we let it grow organically into shapes that echo elements from cell biology, chemistry, botany, human anatomy, and medical science.

Our wish is for this mural to be a permanent fixture at UHN, a source of inspiration and energy for all the stressed, worried, and hopeful people who come here – and work here. We hope it will be a pleasing and comforting place to rest the eyes and mind.
If you’d like to be in touch with Nurse Tilda or learn about her books, visit www.nursetilda.com or email her at tilda@nursetilda.com

Watch

An evening with Nurse Tilda

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