



A young surgical resident.  
 An accomplished attending surgeon.  
 A shared portrait.

Photographs & Text by Rick Nahmias

Even with the many demanding years of schooling it takes to become a doctor, there is no way to complete the training through textbooks, testing, and trial and error alone. The process of mentoring is core to this intense journey.

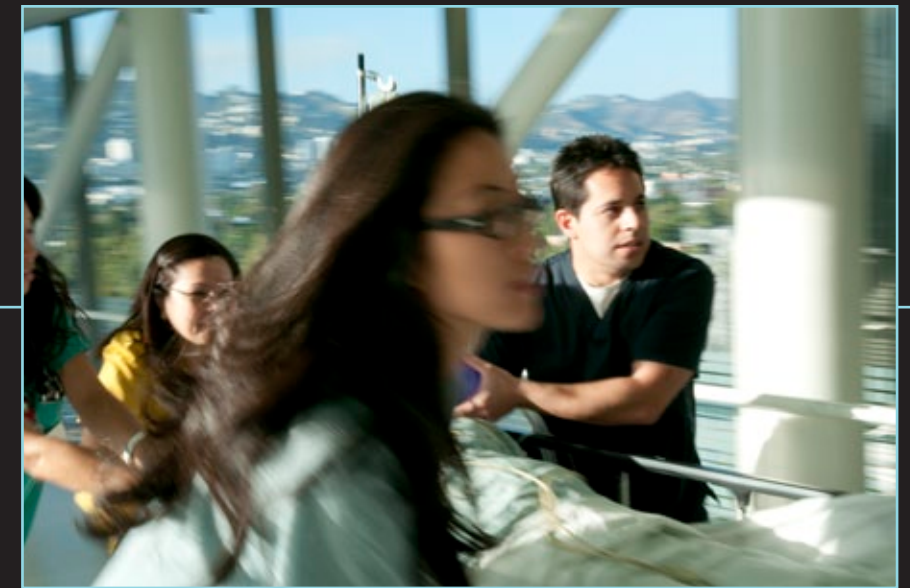
For the next generation of doctors, mentoring has become something of a science unto itself, allowing those in training the opportunity to spend a great deal of time studying under a lineage of experienced physicians as they work their way up from medical school to the OR. What may be news to many is that Cedars-Sinai is at the forefront of creating and administering cutting-edge programs that support the mentoring process and skills improvement of tomorrow's medical professionals.

Danny Shouhed is a third-year surgery resident who specifically chose to do his residency at Cedars-Sinai for this very reason. Danny and Shirin Towfigh, MD—associate professor in the Division of General Surgery and the Center for

Minimally Invasive Surgery, and the director of the Medical Student Education Program—have forged a deep mentoring relationship since his arrival here. Photographer Rick Nahmias followed them across the stretch of a normal day, recording each individually as well as during *shared moments*. This story was shot at a time when Danny was at a significant crossroads in his career: deciding which surgical specialty he wanted to pursue, while Dr. Towfigh was in the throws of a busy summer performing numerous operations, teaching a new class of residents and students, overseeing research projects, and inspiring a whole new corps of surgeons-in-training. The following story looks at a day in the life of these two tireless individuals and how their intersecting paths have brought a greater depth of knowledge and sensitivity to their own lives, as well as to their patients and the greater Cedars-Sinai community.



**5:13a** Danny gets up and prepares for his day as the on-call junior resident for the Trauma Service.



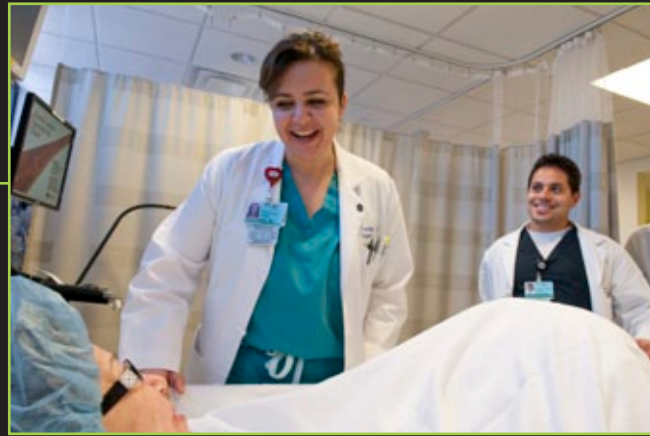
**6:38** Within an hour of arriving, Danny attends to a patient suffering from sudden internal bleeding due to a ruptured spleen.

**8:12** Dr. Towfigh debriefs with a group of summer research students who have traveled from universities across the nation to study under her.



# Surgery

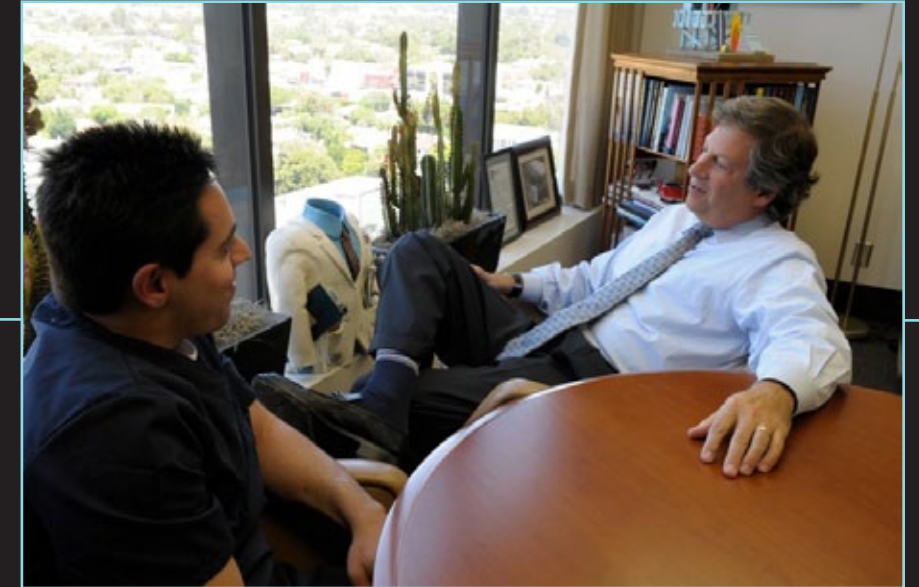
**9:08** With his trauma patient stabilized after an emergency splenectomy, Danny joins Dr. Towfigh at a pre-operative visit with a patient about to have a laparoscopic hernia repair. The patient, a woman from Arizona, came to Cedars-Sinai for her procedure because of the reputation and expertise of Dr. Towfigh, a nationally recognized leader in complex hernia surgery.



**9:25-12:35p** Under the direction and guidance of Dr. Towfigh, Danny delicately inserts the laparoscopic camera. However, it soon becomes clear that the patient's condition requires the surgical team to convert to open surgery for repair of the hernia.

**12:42** From real surgery to simulation, Danny heads to the Surgical Skills Simulation Lab to work on his laparoscopic techniques.





## Surgical Skills

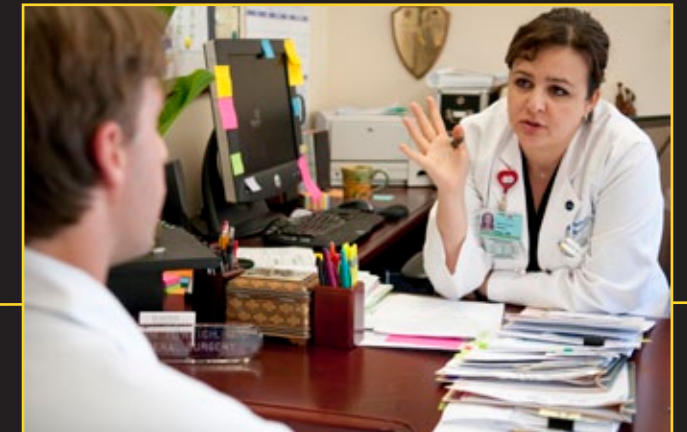
**1:25** In the Surgical Skills Simulation Lab, Danny and other residents hone their skills with the aid of high-tech simulators. These extremely sophisticated machines replicate the near-exact sensations and steps related to specific laparoscopic techniques: from suturing and knot tying to organ handling. In between these one-on-one demos, Dr. Towfigh tests a group of UCLA medical students on surgical instruments.



**2:04** Prior to his next operation, Danny studies up on surgical technique and anatomy.

**2:30** Danny meets with Bruce Gewertz, MD, surgeon-in-chief and chair of the Department of Surgery, who takes an active role with hands-on mentoring of all surgical residents. They discuss lifestyle, work hours, environment, and the future of various specialties he is considering.

**3:30** Dr. Towfigh counsels a visiting senior medical student taking part in Cedars-Sinai's highly competitive sub-internship program in surgery. After hearing details of his background and application for surgical residency, she advises him on revising his personal statement and creating a four-month plan to improve his chances of finding a good residency match.



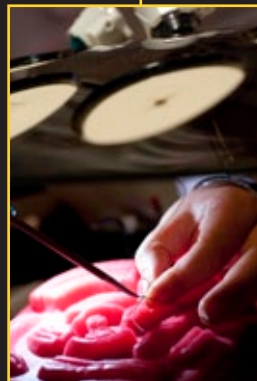


**4:11** Making his twice-a-day rounds, Danny stops in on one of his patients, a man suffering from end-stage kidney disease who needed permanent access for dialysis. Danny, who took part in the procedure that was performed to place the arteriovenous fistula, is pleased to see that it remains open and operational.

**4:11** Dr. Towfigh visits with the patient on whom she and Danny operated earlier. She is recovering well after the complex open surgery.

**4:39** Dr. Towfigh catches up with Danny over coffee for an informal moment to offer mentorship. Dr. Towfigh brings up key issues Danny needs to consider when making his final choice, including the future advances in his field and the patient populations he'll be interacting with. As their conversation winds down, Danny is leaning heavily towards merging surgical oncology and minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery—two areas he enjoys. Dr. Towfigh confirms this would indeed set him apart as a doctor with a rare but well-needed ability to offer minimally invasive procedures to cancer patients.

**6:15** Dr. Towfigh finishes her day at Cedars-Sinai in her research lab. Using a bariatric model, she is testing laparoscopic suturing and other surgical techniques aimed at solving the challenges encountered with operating on patients with varying body fat levels.



**7:12** Danny and his girlfriend arrive at his parents' home. After sharing a drink with his father and unwinding from a long day, the entire family gathers for their weekly Shabbat dinner.

**9:30** Dr. Towfigh continues work on her manuscript, "Can You Cut It: What It Takes to Get into a General Surgery Residency," in which she offers surgical residency candidates step-by-step directions and insider information to ensure they obtain a perfect residency match. This type of information is currently unavailable to most candidates she mentors. She takes her detail-oriented, delicate approach to the canvas as she unwinds by working on her painting. ☺

