



24 Hours In A&E: Andrew and Doreen's 'love story in the face of racism' captivated the nation

Innovation is key to longevity

As *24 Hours In A&E* approaches its 200th episode, Spencer Kelly reflects on how it has evolved



WHEN I WAS ASKED to look after *24 Hours In A&E* by The Garden co-founders Nick Curwin and Magnus Temple in March 2015, I immediately felt the honour of working on their flagship

fixed-rig series, coupled with the fear of delivering what was then Channel 4's biggest 9pm documentary commission – a whopping 34 episodes. Added to that, my first was to be the 100th.

The show has a legacy of tackling some of Britain's most pressing social issues: homelessness, mental health, immigration, mixed-race relationships, bullying, racism, substance abuse and knife crime. Approximately 664 patients have featured across 200 episodes at King's College Hospital and St George's in south London.

It also has a legacy of nurturing and retaining great production talent, so I was surrounded from the start by people who knew what they were doing. Thankfully, it still attracts some of the most promising senior producers, PDs and editors, including those schooled through the editors' training scheme.

We also had C4 commissioning editors Rita Daniels and Madonna Benjamin to help us navigate the fine balance of keeping the series true to its form, while constantly refreshing it. More often, it was the subtle changes that made the difference.

One of the first things we did to encourage the gallery directors to cut with cameras on the move, zooming in or reframing to capture the high-octane drama when staff attend to the most critically sick and injured patients – no mean feat with up to 110 cameras to navigate. The traditional grammar of filming on the rig was for camera operators to perfectly position and frame each shot for the gallery director to cut, but once we showed them an edit of a trauma arrival, they could instantly see the fruits of their labour.

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Alongside that, we have constantly added other stylistic features – a jib on a low loader to film ambulance shots, rigging GoPros on staff and using DJI Osmo tracking shots – all to refresh the familiar geography of A&E.




But visual changes will only get you so far. The constant challenge is to deliver compelling medical and personal narratives without falling back on predictable tropes. There was a trend to begin films by introducing a staff protagonist but, encouraged by Rita, we opened films in more intriguing ways, such as patient or staff 'thought tracks' combined with stylised shots.

This created myriad ways in which to frame films and innovate.

There has been plenty to play with over the years – both before and during my time. The series has told the stories of 124 patients who have fallen, 31 patients hit by vehicles, 34 cycling accidents, 29 strokes, three people diagnosed with deadly abdominal aortic aneurysms, 13 horse-riding injuries, 14 alcohol-related injuries and one moving case of broken-heart syndrome.

At the more unusual end of the spectrum, objects have been removed from ears and noses, three people were attacked by cats, two patients were admitted with injuries sustained from a clothes horse, one had chronic flatulence, one man had trodden on a fishbone and another had a curious case of constant hiccups.

C4's *24 Hours In A&E* has always held up a mirror to modern Britain, giving a voice to the diversity of patients and staff sharing experiences that often raise the social issues of our time. This is as important as ever.

When patients Andrew and Doreen's 'love story in the face of racism' scored the unlikely honour of a double-page spread in the *Daily Mail*, 83 million views on social media and being shared online by Jeremy Corbyn, it proved that even as it approaches its 200th birthday, *24 Hours In A&E* remains as timely as ever.    **► Spencer Kelly is head of factual at The Garden. The 200th episode of *24 Hours In A&E* airs on Channel 4 on 17 December**