

Off Camera Directional Lighting Using On Camera Flash

By: Don Aittama, NILMDTS Affiliated Photographer

Have you wondered about how you can get nice directional lighting using your on camera flash? Most of us don't have assistants to help us during NILMDTS sessions which eliminates the option of setting up an off camera light. There is a way that you can create a really nice directional light using your on camera flash.

First, take the diffuser off of your flash. This includes the square shaped diffuser that came with your flash and the "Gary Fong" diffusers. Yes, they create "soft" looking light but is it the right kind of light? My answer is no, not always - the light they create can be very flat because the diffuser sprays the light all around the room, filling in all of the shadows in your images. The direct light from the diffuser can also create specular highlights on your subject

Second, turn your flash around and point it at the wall so that the only light hitting your subject is coming from the wall. This creates a nice "soft box" on the wall. One setting you want to change on your flash is to set the zoom to manual. I generally set mine to around 90mm to 105mm. If you leave it in auto, it will zoom in and out creating varying sized light sources on the wall. At 24mm the light on the wall will become very large and very flat on your subject. What you want is a small light on the wall, approximating the size of the soft box that is suggested for NILMDTS work - about 3 feet. (Please note in the training manual they suggest a small strip light about 10" x 36" held about 3 to 5 ft away. If the wall is 6-8 ft behind you the light can be slightly larger to create the same effect.)



What about color balance? Most hospital rooms have all kinds of off white colors on their walls which include virtually every color in the rainbow. The bounced light will pick up that color and it will have an affect the resulting images. I don't worry about this for two reasons. First, I shoot raw images and if I am concerned about color balance I shoot a gray card and then it is very simple to adjust in Photoshop Lightroom. Second, since most of the images are usually converted to black and white, color balancing is not an issue anyways. If you feel a particular hue or color is creating a distracting dark or light affect in the black and white image, you can use your Hue/Saturation/Color adjustment in Lightroom to adjust the intensity of the blacks and whites in the image created by specific underlying color.

One other suggestion - set your shutter, aperture and ISO so that it eliminates the room light. Most room light is directly overhead and does not create a pleasant looking light source.

(NILMDTS does not endorse any specific equipment. This is just one way to light a session. There are many others!)