Film

Surgery for all: the right to heal

“The Right to Heal is a troubling film that exposes the enduring absence of surgery from current global health priorities.”

As the world looks towards the post-2015 agenda, global surgery faces a turning point. At the inauguration of the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery, Jim Yong Kim, President of The World Bank, underlined current challenges in the delivery of surgical care: “the poor suffer due to a shortage of skilled personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and a pay-as-you-go approach to financing surgical care”. Next year the World Health Assembly will hopefully be in a position to pass a resolution on surgery.

With these perspectives in mind, The Right to Heal is timely and engages the public and policy makers in the issues at hand. Revealing the poverty traps and devastating effects of insufficient surgery, we meet 7-year-old Rodney with untreated club feet, 8-year-old Job with non-union of his broken right arm, and 17-year-old Pricilla who has vaginal fistula after unattended obstructed labour. The film features the Rwandan Minister of Health who emphasises the need for residency programmes for obstetricians, surgeons, and anaesthetists. Her stance contrasts with the more immediate pragmatism of training Malawian medical officers to perform select surgical procedures, and with the work of charitable NGOs helping those the national health-care system has abandoned.

There is an important balance to be struck in humanitarian documentary reporting, between stereotyped sensationalism and recognition of human equality behind a veil of ignorance. The cinematic language that solicits compassion from high-income country donors speaks with a different cultural accent from that which will spur empathy and recognition from those in the field. I find myself most affected by low-key narratives, by the simple cases of neglected surgical disease. The Right to Heal has already engaged with funders and policy-makers, and it has the potential to mobilise public support at the grassroots-level through social media. I hope these compelling stories of patients and providers will serve as cure for cognitive cataract to surgical inequities.

Lars Hagander
Pediatric Surgeon, Department of Clinical Sciences, Lund University, Sweden
lars.hagander@med.lu.se
I am Co-chair of the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery.

Written and directed by Jaymie Ang Henry. Golden Hour Films
http://www.therighttoheal.org/
To watch The Right to Heal see Online for video