

What's killing our doctors?

PRESS KIT

A film by Robyn Symon

DO NO HARM

Exposing the Hippocratic Hoax

Short Synopsis:

Doctors take an oath to save lives but are taking their own at an alarming rate, trapped in a toxic healthcare system that puts their lives and their patients' lives at risk in an epidemic that's been covered up for decades – until now.

Medium Synopsis:

“Do No Harm” follows four people bonded by tragedy on a mission to expose medicine’s dirty secret. Doctors and medical students pull back the curtain on the causes and cover-up of the alarming rate of suicide of physicians, the highest rate among all professions and almost twice the general population. At a time when we’re facing an unprecedented doctor shortage, more than one million patients lose their doctors to suicide every year yet because of the stigma of suicide, it’s often covered up.

In “Do No Harm” two-time Emmy winning producer Robyn Symon discovers that suicide is just the tip of the iceberg; a symptom of a much larger crisis in medicine. The corporatization of medicine is leading to an epidemic of depression, drug abuse, sleep deprivation and burnout that begins in medical school with cutthroat competition, bullying and mounting student debt trapping students in an assembly-line model of care. The pressure continues through residency and impacts practicing physicians who see life and death every day but fear seeking emotional help will jeopardize their careers. The irony is that you would think the medical community would hold itself to a higher standard when it comes to the health well-being of its own – but in fact the opposite is true. The internal and external pressures physicians face today are too often ignored because doctors are supposed to show no weakness. But the dysfunction not only compromises the well-being of physicians; the film draws a link between high rates of burnout, sleep deprivation and the high rate medical errors. Today medical mistakes, from a range of causes result in the preventable deaths of more than 250,000 people every year, making it the 3rd leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer to which Senator Bernie Sanders asks, “Why isn’t this on the front page of the papers every single day?”



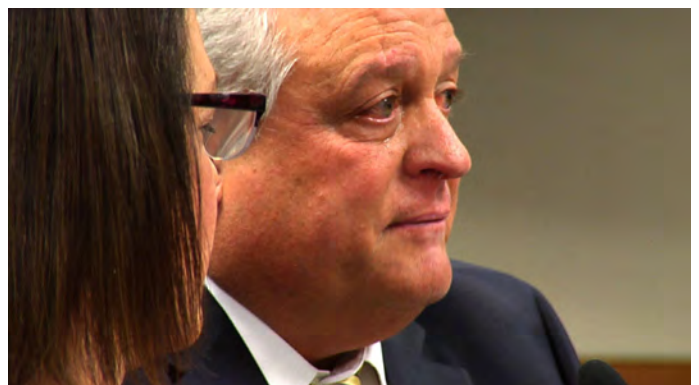
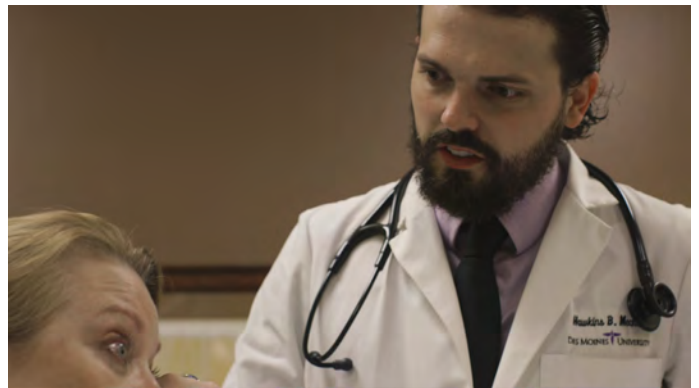
MORE ABOUT THE FILM:

Getting accepted into medical school is a moment of great pride for young idealistic healers and their families, the culmination of a lifetime of hard work and high achievement, yet students are totally unaware of the toxic world they are about to enter that results in high rates of depression, sleep deprivation and suicide. In fact, we learn that physicians suicide rate is almost twice the rate of the general population. And it all begins in medical school.

We meet 4th year medical student Hawkins Mecham after a failed suicide attempt as he struggles to keep his dream of becoming a doctor alive. We follow him after graduation from medical school into a grueling residency program that threatens his marriage and his life. He reaches out to Dr. Pamela Wible, who, after losing many colleagues to suicide, has become a 'guardian angel' to suicidal medical students and physicians. She's become a strong force in the fight to expose what she calls an "abusive medical system" that pushes many medical students and doctors to suicide. She sets out on a mission to expose the decades long inaction and cover-up by medical institutions. It's a race against time to save physicians trapped in a sick medical system where the internal and external pressures force many doctors to self-destruct.

Dr. Wible introduces Hawkins to John and Michele Dietl, parents who turn their grief into action after their son, Kevin, takes his life just three months shy of graduating medical school. They embark on a mission to enact a new law that would force medical schools to report the rates of depression among their students in a first step toward addressing the crisis. Through our characters we explore the factors which create this unsafe and unhealthy environment for medical students and doctors that lead many to take their own lives, among them: bullying, assembly line care, sleep deprivation from working dangerously long shifts, and witnessing daily trauma without the ability to get emotional help for fear of jeopardizing their careers.

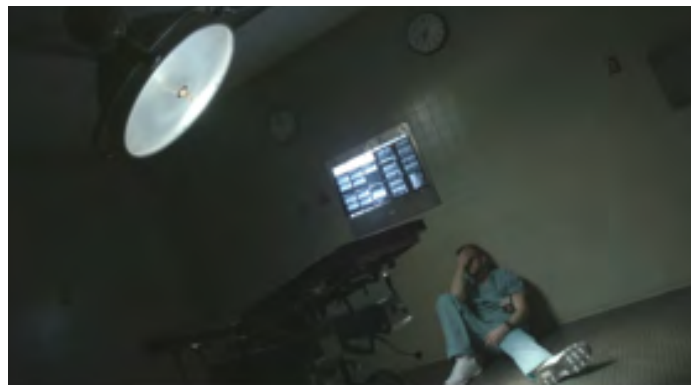
Experts and authors interwoven throughout the film offer context and history of how physician suicide and depression has become a global epidemic where physicians around the world are



MORE ABOUT THE FILM:

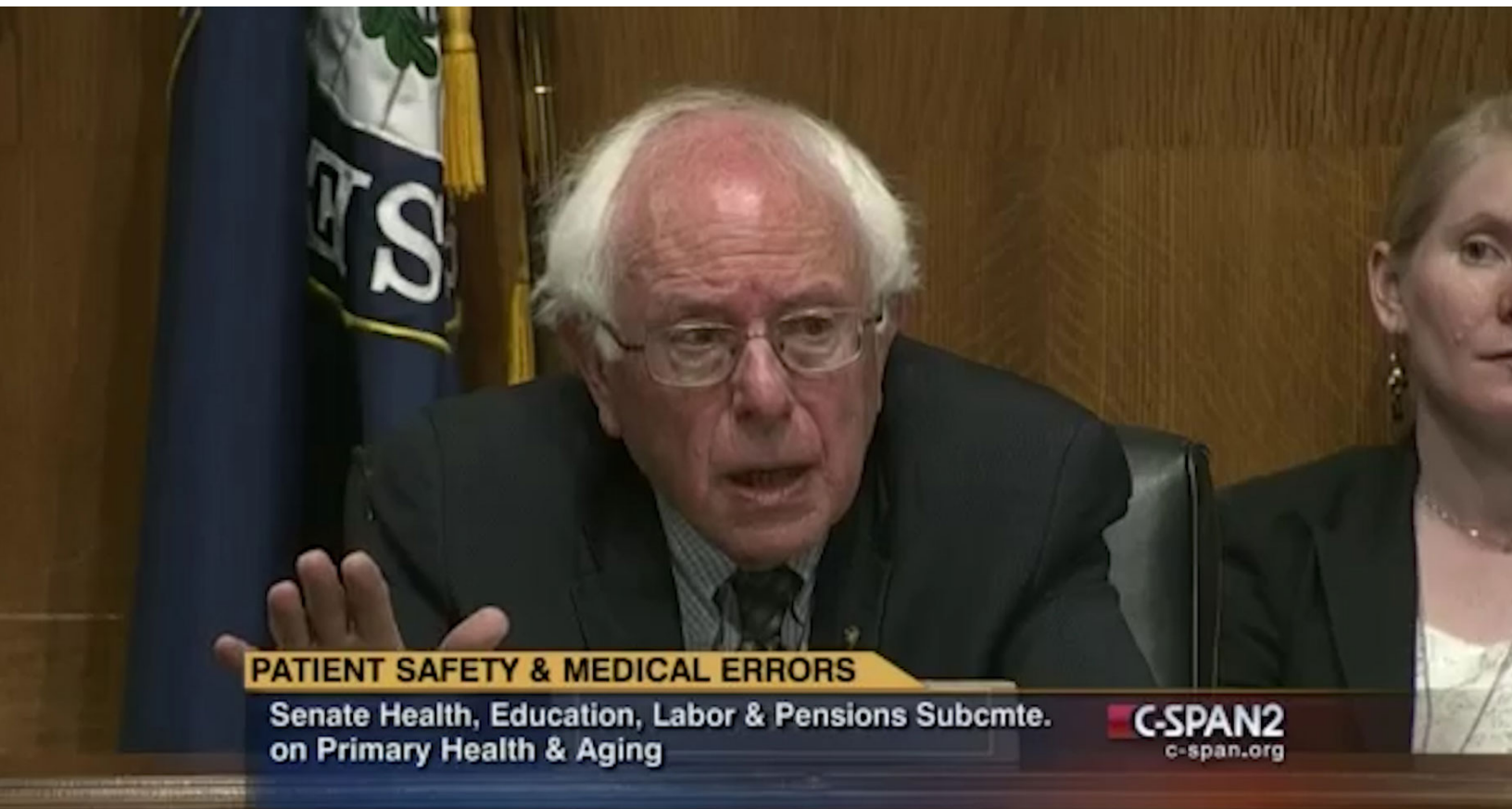
chronically sleep deprived and not able to reach out for emotional help because of the stigma of mental health which could compromise the quality of patient care.

In the U.S., we see how young doctors are set up to fail by being forced to work up to 28 hour shifts putting patients at risk. We confront leaders of regulatory agencies about why the high rates of suicide and burnout have persisted for decades without change. We explore possible solutions including legislative reform and efforts to destigmatize mental health in medicine to make it safe for doctors to reach out for emotional help. But we learn a century-old medical culture is slow to change with a new focus on “resiliency and burnout training” rather than a harsh look at the systemic problems at the root of the epidemic. As more and more doctors leap from rooftops, put a gun to their heads, and overdose on pills, our heroes fight for systemic reform and to save suffering doctors. But will they be able to save Hawkins?



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Run Time: 85 minutes
Screening Format: DCP
Aspect Ratio: 16x9 HD
Audio: Digital 5.1
Year: 2018
Country: USA
Website: DoNoHarmFilm.com



WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *DO NO HARM*

"I think you truly have done something heroic and impressive bringing light to this taboo topic."

– Paul D. Kivela, M.D., M.B.A., FACEP ACEP President 2017-2018

"It was hard to watch but, I believe that it will be the impetus for discussions which are literally life-saving. Thank you for this amazing film and for caring about this issue so much!"

– Amy Walston, Kaiser Permanente

"Do No Harm is a powerful, encouraging start to expand the conversation about medical student and physician suicide beyond our profession – and into the broader community."

– Thomas Madejski, MD Pres. Medical Society of the State of New York

"The film is timely and compelling. And since it raises a call to address the acute and urgent problem of medical student suicide, depression, anxiety and burnout, trainee abuse and welfare, we think it would be a wonderful film for the Stanford Office of Medical Student Wellness that could help further conversation and action for the medical student Congratulations on creating a deeply moving film!"

– Diana Farid, Stanford Medical School



"We were deeply touched by the film, and really in tears by the end. It makes an incredibly important contribution to the discussion of physician health, and will help so many institutions get necessary conversations going for the first time."

– Dr. Vanessa Downing, Director, Content Development & Training Christiana Care Health System

"I thank you for doing such a great job with the film. I definitely want to be able to coordinate some programming, either with my residency program/university or LACMA. Congratulations on such a phenomenal and needed piece."

– C. Freeman, MD, MBA, FAPA- President Elect, Los Angeles County Medical Association, UCLA Dir., Psychiatry Residency Training Program

"The film is an unflinching look at the systems that are driving dedicated providers to burnout and self-harm. In my observation, the way individual stories were woven into the dissection of the epidemic of physician suicide provided a spark of recognition that allowed the audience to lower their emotional barriers and participate in a truly meaningful discussion after the film. I can't wait to bring it to other hospitals."

– Vivian Fernandez/ CIR/ Committee of Interns and Residents

"Our screening of *Do No Harm* has created a lot of discussion about mental health and wellness

initiatives on both the Kansas City and Joplin campuses. Since the viewing, word of mouth has spread about how powerful the film. We are thrilled with the student response to the documentary and would love to facilitate an additional screening time."

– Casey Himmelsbach, Asst Director of Student Affairs Kansas City School of Medicine

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *DO NO HARM*

"This film was truly eye-opening and a very complimentary addition to our school's culture. The film sparked a fruitful and much needed discussion with our residents, physicians, and students in attendance. "

– Jaime Thomas, MA Student Program Coordinator, Student Affairs Dell Medical School UT Texas at Austin



"Based on that feedback, we decided to schedule 'continuing the conversation' sessions. The idea is to keep the discussion going from the night of the screening and, in a more intimate format, discuss specific action items most helpful for our medical community. Our facilitator from that evening also agreed to facilitate these 1-hour monthly discussions. At this point, we have 4 scheduled and we'll plan to reevaluate in December."

– Halie Smith, MPH Special Projects Coordinator,
Metro Omaha Medical Society

"We hosted two screenings of *Do No Harm*, one for students and employees, and an evening viewing for local alumni and members of the Iowa Medical Society (our partner for these events). I cannot tell you how very powerful and meaningful the day was, particularly for students who were realizing they are NOT the only ones in their class who may be stressed and struggling, and who I believe came away inspired by faculty and participating physicians that the system, not THEM, needs to change and *Do No Harm* helped many of us feel empowered to do so. I HAVE to believe *Do No Harm* will begin to change the direction. You're a hero who stayed the course to produce this very important documentary!"

– Barb Dietrich Boose Public Relations and Editorial Director Des Moines University

"I would like to congratulate you on a job well done. It was such a powerful and respectful documentary."

– Dian A. Ginsberg, American Assoc. for Physician Leadership

"Bravo What a wonderful film."

– Michael Myers, MD, Prof Clinical Psychiatry, SUNY
Downstate Medical Center

"I want to thank you again for allowing us to leverage your great film to raise awareness and galvanize our efforts in this critical issue."

– Mark Jarrett, MD, MBA, MS SVP & Chief Quality Officer and
Associate Chief Medical Officer, Northwell Health, NY



"The providers in our organization and community of caregivers found *Do No Harm* to be deeply impactful and thought-provoking. It prompted reflection and excellent discussion. After the event, we moved forward in establishing a physician wellbeing group to tackle some of the issues in our community."

– Jennifer Frank, MD Interim CMO, Clinically Integrated Network, Thedacare

MAIN CHARACTERS



Hawkins Mecham is a 4th year med student who attempted suicide and was saved by a fortuitous phone call from his wife just before he bled to death. We follow him as he struggles through his residency in hopes of fulfilling his childhood dream of becoming a healer.



John and Michele Dietl are the parents of Kevin Dietl, who took his life three months before graduating medical school. We follow them during their first year after their loss as they turn grief into legislative action.



Dr. Pamela Wible is a physician, once suicidal herself, who now runs a hotline and a retreat and has been called a 'guardian angel' to suicidal doctors and med students.

INTERVIEWEES



Darrell Kirch, MD
President & CEO, AAMC



Thomas Nasca, MD
Accreditation Council for Graduate
Medical Education (ACGME)



Steven Stack, MD
President, American Medical
Association (AMA)



Sandeep Jauhar, MD
Cardiologist/Author of "Intern" and
"Doctored"



Kim Perry, DO
Dean of Medical Students, A.T. Still
University, Missouri



**Chris Landrigan, MD & Charles
Czeisler, MD**
Harvard Medical Sleep Center



Paul Puri, MD
Psychiatrist, UCLA Clinical Assistant
Professor



David Duncan
Investigative Reporter/Author of "The
Residents"



Keith Frederick, DO
Physician/State Representative, Missouri



Stuart Slavin, DO
Associate Dean, St. Louis University



Greg Mims, MD
Family Physician



Sunny Smith, MD
Clinical Professor, UC San Diego

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I come from a family of physicians. They were the pillars of our family and never spoke about the pressures during medical training or dealing with the challenges of today's medical culture. So in 2014, when someone sent me an editorial from The New York Times about two young doctors who jumped off the roofs of their hospitals- I was shocked and needed to find out why.

What I discovered was a very toxic culture beginning in medical school. From bullying, isolation, the burden of huge student loans to sleep deprivation to the fear of the career repercussions if you want to get emotional help. Post training- trying to survive and feel fulfilled in today's assembly-line model of care- has led to high levels of depression and suicide.

What was also alarming was the link between sleep deprivation and medical errors. Every other profession is regulated. Truckers can only drive so many hours but doctors who deal with life and death can work unlimited hours- with deadly consequences. While we understand the importance of continuity of patient care...and certainly if there is no other doctor in the hospital of course – saving a life comes first but other than those rare instances – doctors are human too and need work life balance to deliver the best patient care.

Doctors, patients, everyone is at risk but no one is talking about it. As Senator Bernie Sanders says in the film, "Why isn't this on the front pages of the papers every single day?"

I think we deserve to know the answer. Many of the people working on the film have been personally affected by the tragedy of physician suicide which makes our mission all the more personal. I am passionate about bringing this issue to light so we can de-stigmatize mental health and protect the lives not only of physicians but the patients they serve.

– **Robyn Symon**, *Producer/Director*



PRODUCTION TEAM



Robyn Symon – Producer/Director

Robyn Symon is a two-time Emmy™ award-winning filmmaker and former PBS producer specializing in documentaries and television series. In 2007, Symon debuted in the indie film arena, producing, directing, and editing the feature documentary *Transformation: The Life & Legacy of Werner Erhard* about one of the most controversial pioneers of the multi-billion dollar self-help industry; it was acquired for international distribution by Screen Media Films. Other award-winning films include *Behind the Blue Veil* (Journeyman Pictures) about the war on terror in West Africa and *Uncle Gloria: One Helluva Ride* (XLRATOR Media) about transgender rights. A former TV news reporter, Robyn has written and produced hundreds of hours of television programming for various networks including PBS, Travel Channel, NBC, Discovery, CNBC, HGTV, the Reelz Channel and others. She's currently on an international film tour with her latest documentary feature *DO NO HARM* about the hidden epidemic of physician suicide and burnout. In addition to two Emmys, Robyn has been honored by the Associated Press, NABJ and three national Telly awards, among others.



Doug Blush – Consulting Editor, ACE

Doug Blush is an award-winning director, producer, editor, writer and cinematographer whose work included over 80 feature film and television projects. His recent credits include; as Supervising Editor, the 2013 Oscar®-winning *20 Feet From Stardom*, for which he also received the ACE Eddie Award for Best Documentary Editing, and the current doc hit *The Music of Stranger: Yo Yo Ma and The Silk Road Ensemble*, both from director Morgan Neville. Doug was Co-Editor and Associate Producer of Kirby Dick's *The Hunting Ground* in 2014 and the Oscar®-nominated and Emmy winning *The Invisible War* in 2012. He also supervised the 2016 Sundance Audience Award and Emmy™ winning *Jim: The James Foley Story*, now playing on HBO.

Jason Rosenfield – Consulting Editor, ACE

Jason Rosenfield is a three-time Emmy™ Award-winning film editor recognized for his storytelling and stylistic skills in character-driven long-form documentaries, feature films and television series. Jason's narrative credits range from Robert Altman's classic *Come Back to the 5 & Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* to the improvisational television comedy *Free Ride*. His documentary credits include the Oscar®-nominated *Blues Highway*, HBO's Emmy-winning *Memphis PD* and *Teen Killers*, Dick Wolf's groundbreaking NBC series *Law & Order: Crime & Punishment* and CNN's *The Seventies*.

CREDITS

Directed and Produced by Robyn Symon

Executive Producer Jill Zeiger

Edited by Robyn Symon

Consulting Editors Doug Blush, ACE
Jason Rosenfield, ACE

Cinematography Guy Mossman

Co-Producers Christopher Bryniak
Derek Muhs
Jeff Tangney
John Chen
Susan Evans

Associate Producers Cathleen Peterson-Layne
Christiana Care Health Systems
Jill Fadal
Joel L Reed
Laura Agg
Laura Georgakakos
Lori Barr
Rachael Barr
Vivian Marasigan

Music by Ronen Landa

Production Manager Cami J. Kidder



The Hidden Epidemic Of Doctor Suicides

NYU medical grad jumps to death from dorm roof

By Kathryn Cusma, Shawn Cohen and Sophia Rosenbaum

More than 900,000 Americans lose their doctors to suicide each year. But doctors are finally beginning to talk about it.



HUFFPOST

"Physician, heal thyself."

PSYCHIATRIC NEWS

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THE SURGERY PODCAST

#163: Do No Harm

THE DIRECTOR RESPONDS...

Q: *What was the hardest part about making this film?*

Robyn Symon: Getting doctors and medical students to talk about this hidden epidemic because of the stigma attached to suicide and mental health.

Q: *Have you gotten any pushback since making the film?*

R.S.: When we started, no medical institutions wanted to participate in the film because of this shroud of secrecy. But once the President of the AAMC agreed to be interviewed, then the other organizations fell in line or risked reinforcing what people already felt about these organizations, which was that they were turning a blind eye to the problem.

Q: *Are the medical schools or institutions responding?*

R.S.: I've been surprised at how many medical schools and hospitals have reached out to us wanting to screen the film. This is encouraging and I hope they all do. There's still a fear of hurting their brand, their image, their bottom line if they come out of the shadows and discuss this, but I'm hopeful.

Q: *Are you surprised by the lack of coverage around physician suicide?*

R.S.: Suicides aren't covered in the news in general. Only India reads suicide notes on national television. There's a big taboo around suicide and it's even more so for doctors who are supposed to be perfect. But in recent years, there has been more coverage however addressing the problem is too slow a process.

Q: *What was your most shocking discovery during this process about physician suicide?*

R.S.: One shocking thing we uncovered was that young doctors, because they are considered cheap labor, are worked 28 hour shifts while they're caring for patients, dealing with life and death. They are regulated by an agency called the ACGME who recently increased their work hours despite overwhelming evidence that shows sleep deprivation leads to medical errors. The other devastating thing that we uncovered was that medical errors are the third leading cause of death behind cancer and heart disease. But because on death certificates there's no code for medical errors, it's difficult really know how many deaths and medical errors occur because unlike the airline industry, physicians hide their mistakes because of the liability. It was this link that made me realize, this story impacts everyone.

Q: *Did you or the film get derailed at any time?*

R.S.: Besides raising funds to make the movie, the challenge of getting into hospitals and getting close to young doctors who are fearful to come forward because it may jeopardize their careers made this film challenging.

Q: *What are your hopes for the future? Can we do anything?*

R.S.: Our goal with the film is to promote a dialogue in the healthcare system so doctors and medical students feel safe reaching out for help and to make systemic changes to allow physicians to perform at their bests including regulating duty hours to reduce sleep deprivation- a huge problem for physicians but the patients they serve because if you have a doctor who isn't functioning physically or mentally, you can't have good care.



Website: donoharmfilm.com

View the trailer at donoharmfilm.com/trailer

For press inquiries, please contact us at: info@donoharmfilm.com

Check out **PRESS** for DO NO HARM at donoharmfilm.com/press

Symon
PRODUCTIONS