Dear Viewer,

I have visited the country of Ukraine many times since 1994, and I have never failed to be fascinated by it on each visit. Its surreal mix of humor, emotion, tragedy and wonderful visuals is utterly captivating, and I kept promising myself that one day I would make a film there.

In 2003 I met brain surgeon Henry Marsh, and we soon discovered that we shared a love of this strange and forsaken land. He had been going to Kyiv for over a decade to help a Ukrainian protégé named Igor Kurilets create a viable brain surgery clinic, and theirs was an incredible story. Battling against massive logistical odds and the wrath of the old Soviet health system, Igor and Henry had been denounced, banned and finally shut down. But by smuggling in discarded National Health Service (NHS) medical equipment from the U.K., Henry was slowly able to equip Igor to do operations no one else in Ukraine could do. Patients flocked to see them, and Igor’s clinic became very popular.

In early 2006 I went with Henry on one of his many trips to Kyiv, and after spending just a few minutes with him and Igor in a small consulting room seeing an endless queue of desperate patients, I knew I had the film about Ukraine I had wanted to make for years.

Why? Because that country’s political struggle to change itself for the better was mirrored in the moral and logistical struggle Henry had to continue working as a good doctor.

Here was a man patients saw as a great savior from the West, a man parents thought could save their dying children and a man Igor saw as a god and a benefactor. But for all the direct satisfaction that Henry gets from going and, indeed, saving lives, he also constantly sees misdiagnosed patients he could have helped had their problems been identified correctly, children he can’t save and old equipment and untrained staff that threaten the very risky operations he and Igor are trying to carry out. Henry says, “It’s like selling your soul to the devil, but what can you do? My son had a brain tumor as a baby and I was desperate for someone to help me. I simply can’t walk away from that need in others.”

It is precisely this dilemma — a dilemma of his own making — that makes Henry so interesting, and it is this same dilemma that lets us see his troubled and compassionate humanity. His godlike surgical power to save lives is set against his fallible humanity, as a haunting memory of losing a young Ukrainian girl in an operation some years ago has led Henry to painfully embrace what he calls the “nobility of failure.” Indeed, this is the emotional center of my film and the universal theme at the heart of it: the struggle to do good things in a selfish and flawed world.

This is ultimately not a medical film, nor is it a portrait of a saint. Rather, it is about a man who openly wrestles with moral and ethical issues that touch every one of us.

Geoffrey Smith
Director/producer, The English Surgeon
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**Thanks to those who reviewed this guide:**
Geoffrey Smith  
*Director/Producer, The English Surgeon*
What is it like to have power over life and death and yet to struggle with your own humanity? This is the story of acclaimed British neurosurgeon Henry Marsh, who has traveled to Ukraine for 17 years to treat patients who have been left to die; of his friend and medical colleague in Kyiv, who carries on the fight despite official hostility and archaic surgical conditions; and of a young patient, who hopes that Henry can save his life. Tense, heartbreaking and humorous, The English Surgeon is a remarkable depiction of one doctor’s commitment to relieving suffering and of the emotional turmoil he undergoes in bringing hope to a desperate people.
Ukraine

Located on the northern shore of the Black Sea, Ukraine is a nation about the size of Texas and lies between Poland and Russia. Its population, currently just under 46 million people, is gradually shrinking, as Ukraine has a negative growth rate. The capital, Kyiv (formerly spelled Kiev), is located in the north central region, along the Dnieper River. About 70 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Ukraine was the second largest economic force of the Soviet Union, producing a large proportion of the country’s agricultural output, but these levels were not sustained after the nation became independent in 1991. Recent foreign investment in Ukraine has been hampered by corruption, complex regulations and weak enforcement of contract laws. The nation’s economy, which experienced rapid growth in the early 2000s, has cooled considerably, and analysts predict an economic contraction in 2009.

The 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was one of the worst nuclear accidents in history, and the efforts of the Soviet government to conceal the accident and its fallout led to the contamination of about 8 percent of Ukraine’s land mass, contributing to significantly higher cancer rates, particularly thyroid, in the region. According to the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that the Chernobyl incident contributed to a higher incidence of brain tumors. The tumors Marsh sees in Kyiv are the same as those he sees in London, except they are often larger due to a lack of early diagnosis. The disaster did add to Ukraine’s environmental woes, as did the country’s role as an industrial center in the Soviet era, when lax regulation allowed extensive pollution to build up.
Sources:

http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3211.htm

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1102303.stm


http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v90/n11/full/6601860a.html


Health Care in Ukraine

Ukraine, like many of the former components of the Soviet Union, maintains a public health system, in which health care is, in theory, provided by the state free-of-charge. In actuality, the state system is troubled by a maze of bureaucracy and rules that can prevent it from providing the most up-to-date care, particularly for complex conditions that require surgery. Some doctors have developed a hybrid approach in which basic care is provided by the state, while individuals pay for other aspects of their treatments, including surgical supplies and equipment that is not provided by the state.

Infant mortality rates and life expectancy figures in Ukraine are relatively poor; there are 8.98 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, making the country 158th among all nations; the life expectancy for the general population is 68.25 years, which ranks it 150th in the world. The age distribution of the population has shifted notably in the last two decades, as fewer babies have been born and many young people have emigrated. High rates of smoking and alcohol consumption also help keep the nation’s life expectancy low. Public health programs suffered in the 1990s, as funding from the Soviet government disappeared. As a result, the incidence of many infectious diseases rose.

The situation outside Ukraine’s urban centers is generally more dire. In rural areas, the ratio of health-care providers to patients is significantly lower than in cities. Many of the providers are general practitioners who travel across large areas to provide basic care. Advanced treatment of diseases is generally available only in metropolitan areas.
Sources:

“Health Care Systems in Transition: Ukraine.”


“Ukraine’s Hybrid Healthcare System.”
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7484095.stm

Ukrainians and Eastern Europeans in the United States

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were just under 900,000 Ukrainians and Ukrainian Americans in the United States, primarily concentrated around New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and Detroit. These populations largely reflect the settlement patterns of Eastern European in the United States.

Source:

http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-Ukraine.pdf
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- What is the significance or meaning of the film's title?
Henry Marsh opens the film saying, “It is very difficult to know whether one is being brave or reckless, being wise or a coward.” What words would you use to describe the doctors in the film and why?

What have you learned about the health-care system in Ukraine? In your opinion, what are some of its strengths? Weaknesses? After viewing the film, have your thoughts about the American health-care system changed? Explain your answer.

Marsh gives his Ukrainian colleague pieces of old medical equipment (such as perforators) that are treated as disposable in the U.K. Should the United States or U.K. change policies to save costs? If it meant that more people could be treated or that treatment would cost less, would you be willing to undergo surgery with used parts? Why or why not?

Compare the experiences of these doctors with portrayals of surgeons in television dramas, soap operas or popular films. What do you think those portrayals leave out?

Marsh says about the risk involved in performing brain surgery, “I think I can save him, but there is a very real risk I could wreck him in the process . . . When push comes to shove, we can afford to lose an arm or a leg, but I am operating on people’s thoughts and feelings . . . and if something goes wrong I can destroy that person’s character . . . forever.” How do the doctors cope with their responsibilities? What role does/can medical protocol play in helping (or hindering) them when they are making life-altering decisions?

Compare and contrast the experiences of the people in this film with those in Life. Support. Music., which focuses on a case of brain trauma treated in the United States. What do you learn about the strengths and weaknesses of each country’s medical system from watching these films? What principles govern decisions and available treatments in each country?

How does the inability to receive medical care affect people beyond the state of their physical health? What does it do to their ability to care for their children, look for work, perform daily functions and so on? What kinds of costs are absorbed by neighborhoods and communities?
• Host a discussion on the pros and cons of various forms of health coverage in the United States, including universal, single payer and private plans.
• Set up a health fair that connects local providers offering free or sliding-scale fee medical care with those who need it.
• If you are interested in volunteering in your community, visit the following websites:
  • VOLUNTEERMATCH
    www.volunteermatch.org
    VolunteerMatch offers a variety of online services to help individuals, nonprofits and corporations find places to volunteer. In addition, the organization provides an FAQ section as well as virtual volunteering opportunities.
  • SERVE.GOV
    www.serve.gov
    Serve.gov is website provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service that allows you to either register your own project or find a volunteer opportunity in your area.
  • NETWORK FOR GOOD
    www.networkforgood.org
    This website allows visitors to look for volunteer opportunities and donate to causes or organizations in traditional ways or through charitable donation gift certificates called “good cards.”
  • THE VOLUNTER FAMILY
    www.volunteerfamily.org
    The Volunteer Family encourages and facilitates family volunteering, offering family-oriented listings on their website, while simultaneously assisting local agencies plan and prepare for family volunteers.
• To get more involved with organizations specifically committed to medical volunteerism, check out the following organizations:
  • AMERICARES
    www.americares.org/aboutus
    An international relief organization, AmeriCares provides medicines, medical supplies and aid to individuals in need around the world. The group responds to both natural disasters and to the everyday needs of people in countries where health care is inaccessible, unaffordable or of low quality. The AmeriCares website features a section that provides links on how individuals, foundations, corporations and medical personnel can help the cause (http://www.americares.org/howtohelp/).
• **DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS**
  www.doctorswithoutborders.org
  An international medical humanitarian organization created by doctors and journalists, Doctors Without Borders provides medical aid in nearly 60 countries. The organization’s website features recent news and stories of activities and treatment, as well as information on volunteering with the organization (http://doctorswithoutborders.org/work/office/volunteer.cfm?ref=main-menu) and donating to the cause (http://doctorswithoutborders.org/donate/?ref=main-menu).

• **INTERNATIONAL HEALTH VOLUNTEERS**
  www.internationalhealthvolunteers.org
  This independent, not-for-profit organization works to establish an accessible group of physicians, dentists and other medical experts who can assist in domestic and international aid and medical relief. The organization’s website features a page that describes current projects (http://www.internationalhealthvolunteers.org/projects.shtml), and another that provides the steps to take to become a member (http://www.internationalhealthvolunteers.org/cgi-bin/add_member_form.cgi).

• **INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL RELIEF**
  www.imrhq.org
  International Medical Relief works to bring medical services, supplies, training and education to communities around the world and works to empower communities to take care of their medical struggles themselves. The organization sponsors medical mission trips where treatment and education happen on-site, conducted by volunteer doctors and dentists and non-medical volunteers. The group’s website features a page describing how people can help the organization (http://www.imrhq.org/index.cfm?page=howtohelp), as well as a page of information for anyone who would like to volunteer on a medical mission trip (http://www.imrhq.org/index.cfm?page=medical%20mission%20trips).

• **INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION**
  www.imva.org
  The International Medical Volunteers Association website brings together resources on international health volunteering and is a good starting point for people looking to get involved with medical aid. The website features an extensive Q-and-A section about medical volunteering (http://www.imva.org/Pages/volufrm.htm), as well as a list of organizations that potential volunteers can contact (www.imva.org/Pages/orgdb/wblstfrm.htm).
FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.’s The English Surgeon companion website www.pbs.org/pov/englishsurgeon

To further enhance the broadcast, P.O.V. has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The companion website to The English Surgeon offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmaker Geoffrey Smith; a list of related websites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and the following special features:

**Q&A WITH FILMMAKER AND SUBJECT**
Brain surgeon Henry Marsh and filmmaker Geoffrey Smith answer viewer questions.

**ADDITIONAL VIDEO**
Viewers can watch video of brain surgeon Henry Marsh as he performs awake brain surgery.

Official Film Website www.theenglishsurgeon.com

Visit the filmmaker’s website for The English Surgeon and access additional information about the film, download press photos, find ways you can help doctors Henry Marsh and Igor Kurilets in their work in the Ukraine and get a listing of upcoming screenings.

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What’s Your P.O.V.?
Share your thoughts about The English Surgeon by posting a comment on the P.O.V. Blog www.pbs.org/pov/blog or send an email to pbs@pov.org.

Neurology and Neurosurgery

**BBC NEWS: “I WAS AWAKE DURING BRAIN SURGERY”**
http://news.bbc.co.uk

This article follows a British man who had awake brain surgery performed by Henry Marsh, the neurosurgeon featured in The English Surgeon, to remove a brain tumor that had not diminished with chemotherapy and radiation. (March 9, 2004)

**HEALTHLINE: NEUROSURGERY**
www.healthline.com/galecontent/neurosurgery

Set up like an encyclopedia article, this page gives a concise explanation of brain surgery and other therapies to treat brain diseases, tumors and other types of illness. The page also gives brief descriptions of different brain maladies, from hemorrhages to degenerative disorders.

**INTERNATIONAL BRAIN RESEARCH ORGANIZATION**
www.ibro.org/Publications/Pub_Front.asp

This organization was founded in response to growing demand from neuroscientists for an organization that would cut across world boundaries and help improve collaboration and productivity of brain research. The organization runs many programs and features up-to-date publications, as well as providing researchers with suggestions for accessing funding and grant opportunities and donating equipment (http://www.ibro.info/Publications/Pub_Search.asp?S=%25&Submit2=Search&Type=44&Start=&End=&Order=LD_Docs_Title&DIR=ASC&ADV=1).
THE NEW YORK TIMES: “HEALTH GUIDE: BRAIN SURGERY”
http://health.nytimes.com

THE NEW YORK TIMES: “BRAIN SURGERY FREES RUNNER, BUT RAISES BARRIERS”
www.nytimes.com
This article tells the story of a woman who developed epileptic seizures and had surgery to remove the part of her brain that caused the episodes. As a result, she now struggles with some memory loss issues. (July 8, 2009)

SOCIETY FOR NEUROSCIENCE
www.sfn.org
This nonprofit membership organization brings together scientists and physicians who study the brain and nervous system. The group’s website features an extensive list of publications about the brain including several fact sheets (http://www.sfn.org/index.aspx?pagename=publications) and a section devoted to education and advocacy for brain research (http://www.sfn.org/index.aspx?pagename=scienceAdvocacy).

Ukraine

BBC NEWS: “CHERNOBYL’S CANCER WORLD RECORD”
http://news.bbc.co.uk
Part of the BBC’s health section, this page gives a general overview of the Chernobyl disaster, which occurred in Ukraine while it was still a part of the Soviet Union.

BBC NEWS: “COUNTRY PROFILE: UKRAINE”
http://news.bbc.co.uk
This country profile from the BBC gives basic information and facts about Ukraine and also provides a timeline (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1107869.stm) of key events in the country’s history.

BBC NEWS: “UKRAINE’S HYBRID HEALTHCARE SYSTEM”
http://news.bbc.co.uk
This article describes the state of the health-care system in Ukraine, which is paid for by government money, patients and doctors. It offers a look at the way the former Soviet republic is trying to expand and improve the quality of its health care in spite of its economic struggles. (July 2, 2008)

THE CIA WORLD FACTBOOK: “UKRAINE”
www.cia.gov
This entry provides background and current facts and statistics on Ukraine. (May 13, 2009)

THE EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND POLICIES: “HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS IN TRANSITION: UKRAINE.”
Published by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, this extensive report features an in-depth look at the health-care system in Ukraine and provides detailed background on the country. The report also discusses Ukrainian health-care finance and delivery, as well as health-care reforms after the fall of the Soviet Union. (2004)

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: “UKRAINE”
www.who.int/countries/ukr/en
This fact page on Ukraine links to health statistics for the country, as well as to articles about the current health-care situation.
International Health

**AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH ALLIANCE**
www.aiha.com/en
This nonprofit organization works to help communities and nations with limited resources improve their community health through technical assistance as well as community education on a variety of health issues. The group’s website features a page listing places where the organization performs its work that includes information about its work in Ukraine (http://www.aiha.com/en/WhereWeWork/Eurasia/Ukraine.asp). It also suggests different ways that people can get involved (http://www.aiha.com/en/GetInvolved/).

**MEDLINE PLUS: INTERNATIONAL HEALTH**
Medline Plus offers resources and publications that give information about the current state of international health, including information on epidemics, tips on traveling and current collaborative efforts to improve global health.

**UNICEF**
www.unicef.org
UNICEF promotes the health, education and rights of children, noting that care at a young age can lead to a better future. The organization’s website features a page listing ways that people can support UNICEF (http://www.unicef.org/support/index.html), as well as a fact page on its work in Ukraine specifically (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ukraine.html).

**WOMEN FOR WORLD HEALTH**
www.womenforworldhealth.org
Women for World Health evaluates and identifies community medical needs in both the United States and in developing or struggling nations. In addition to raising awareness about these issues and concerns, the group also supports communities through volunteer medical missions. Its website features information on how people can either donate to the organization’s efforts (www.womenforworldhealth.org/SUBMIT_PAYPAL.ASPX) or volunteer with the organization (www.womenforworldhealth.org/volunter.aspx).

**PBS/NPR**

**NEWSHOUR: SHATTERED HEALTH**
www.pbs.org
This transcript of a 1997 interview covers some of the factors fueling the health-care problems that former Soviet Republics like Ukraine are facing today. (Dec. 26, 1997)

**NOVA: BRAIN MAPPING PIONEERS**
www.pbs.org
This concise history covers the major players in modern neuroscience and neurosurgery and the different experiments that each conducted to further the field. There are also links to other information about neurology.

**RX FOR SURVIVAL: A GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGE**
www.pbs.org
This project follows some of public health’s leading pioneers and heroes in more than 20 nations around the world as they work to help control disease and bring medical aid to developing nations.

**NPR**

**FRESH AIR: A SURGEON’S-EYE VIEW OF THE BRAIN**
www.npr.org
This page provides an excerpt from neurosurgeon Katrina Firlik’s book *Another Day in the Frontal Lobe: A Brain Surgeon Exposes Life on the Inside*, which talks about her own personal experiences with brain surgery. (May 10, 2006)
Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 22nd season on PBS in 2009, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. P.O.V., which airs June through September with primetime specials during the year, has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.’s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today’s most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

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P.O.V. works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, P.O.V. offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. P.O.V.’s Youth Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training to use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

P.O.V. Interactive www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.’s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.’s Borders. In addition, the P.O.V. Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The P.O.V. website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.