Celebrated Neurosurgeon Struggles With the Limits of His Healing Ability
In POV’s “The English Surgeon,” Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009, on PBS

Dr. Henry Marsh Faces Obstacles and Archaic Medical Conditions in Ukraine
As He Treats the Most Desperate Patients

A BBC/ITVS International Production; Produced in Association with American Documentary/POV


MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air Date: The English Surgeon has its national broadcast premiere on Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009, at 10 p.m. on PBS during the 22nd season of the POV (Point of View) documentary series. American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series continues on Tuesdays through Sept. 22 and returns with two specials on Nov. 11 and Dec. 30. (Check local listings.)

Summary: 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 15 years to treat patients who have been left to die; of his friend and medical colleague in Kyiv, Dr. Igor Kurilets, 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. A BBC/ITVS International Production in association with American Documentary/POV.

Dr. Kurilets is a man of irrepressible cheer in the face of numerous official investigations that have taken place since he teamed up with Marsh. The strong bond the men share is partly borne of their struggle simply to keep practicing medicine in a society undergoing great upheavals. Shot over three chaotic weeks in the winter of 2007, The English Surgeon follows Marsh and Kurilets as they work endless hours in clinics full of desperately ill people who represent only a fraction the Ukrainians who need neurosurgery.

With all the satisfaction Marsh gets from going to Kyiv, he must confront a lack of staff, equipment and basic supplies, as well as patients grossly misdiagnosed or too late in finding him. Most haunting for Marsh are the children he can’t save.

Filmmaker’s Statement: "Henry’s dilemma is one of his own making; that is what’s so interesting about his story,” says director Geoffrey Smith. “It’s what lets his troubled and compassionate humanity through, and moves him to continue an often painful struggle to do good things in this 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.”
About Dr. Marsh: Since 1988, Dr. Henry Marsh has been the senior consultant neurosurgeon at Atkinson Morley’s/St. George’s hospital in London, one of the city’s largest neurosurgical departments, where he specializes in the surgical treatment of brain tumors. He is also a clinical professor of neurosurgery at the University of Washington, Seattle, and Honorary Consultant Neurosurgeon to the Royal Marsden Hospital, London and the University of Wales, Cardiff.

In the U.K., Marsh pioneered the use of “awake” brain surgery and cortical mapping in such surgery; he has conducted the largest personal series of these operations in the U.K. and one of the largest in Europe. He has written more than 80 peer-reviewed articles on neurosurgical subjects. With a particular interest in the impact of the built environment on hospital staff and patient outcomes, Marsh has written and lectured widely on this subject. In addition, he has delivered lectures on the neuroscientific aspects of consciousness and criminal responsibility.

Filmmaker’s Bio: Geoffrey Smith, Director/Producer
Born in Melbourne, Australia, Geoffrey Smith began traveling early, discovering a twin love for movies and storytelling along the way. In 1987 he found himself in Haiti, helping to make a documentary about the country’s first election in 31 years. Following the discovery of a massacre of 21 voters in a schoolyard, Smith was himself shot and wounded. After struggling to recover in London, he decided to go back to Haiti to find the man who had nearly killed him — and to film the whole thing. The resulting film, “Searching for a Killer,” won wide acclaim and was aired on the BBC. Smith discovered that the camera can be a powerful, cathartic tool in helping people through difficult periods and went on to build his subsequent work around that concept. The winner of numerous awards, he has made more than 22 films and has worked for all the major U.K. broadcasters.

POV Website: The English Surgeon companion website, www.pbs.org/pov/englishsurgeon, offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with the filmmaker, a list of related websites, organizations and books, lesson plans, discussion guides and these special features:

- Film Update: Watch a video update with Henry Marsh and find out what has happened to some of the people featured in the film.
- Additional video: Excerpt from “Your Life in Their Hands,” a documentary directed by Geoffrey Smith for the BBC in 2004. This segment shows a 10-minute clip from the film of an “awake” craniotomy performed on patient Adrian Theobald.
- An extended video interview with Henry Marsh.
- What Kind of Volunteer Are You? Are you interested in volunteering, but don't know where to start? Take this quiz to find out what kinds of activities are best for you, and learn more about opportunities to contribute in your community.

Film Website: The film’s official website, http://www.theenglishsurgeon.com/, provides information and news, along with ways to help Dr. Marsh’s and Dr. Kurilets’ efforts.

Outreach: POV works with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in the film. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events for The English Surgeon, go to: http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php.

POV also works with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a discussion guide with background information to help event organizers carry out discussions around the film’s content. Cari Ladd has created the lesson plan. Shaun Briley of the San Diego Public Library have created a multimedia resource list of related books and videos that further explore the issues. The materials are available free of charge at http://www.pbs.org/pov/englishsurgeon.
The English Surgeon is an Eyeline Films and Bungalow Town production for BBC and ITVS International.

Related news: “The Non-English Surgeon” by Yuliya Popova, Kyiv Post, Aug. 20, 2009: Dr. Ihor Kurilets, Ukrainian co-star of the British documentary “The English Surgeon,” struggles with an outdated medical system, poverty and ignorance in his daily work at a hospital in Kyiv. It is hardly a revelation to Ukrainians that their health-care system is poor, outdated and fails to do the job. Thanks to a British documentary, “The English Surgeon,” more people outside Ukraine know it, too. . . .

[Dr. Marsh's] co-star in the movie, Ihor Kurilets, is Marsh's lesser-known Ukrainian counterpart. Kurilets has won little fame abroad and almost none back home. . . . “The English Surgeon” portrays the grim reality of Kurilets, an outcast of the state medical system because of his unorthodox views. His desperate patients seek salvation in his private clinic, operating in the rented wards of a state hospital. . . .

Off screen, the 50-year-old Kurilets’ reality is even harsher and more relentless than portrayed in the movie. In an interview in late July, he said that he already had enough material for a sequel. Complete story: http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/47267

“Early NATO Membership Unlikely for Georgia, Ukraine,” by Andre de Nesnera, Voice of America, Sept. 4, 2009: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, 12 countries from eastern and central Europe have become NATO members, almost doubling the alliance's number of countries from 15 to 28. [The 12 are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.]

Two other former Soviet Republics – Georgia and Ukraine – have expressed interest in becoming NATO members. The Bush administration strongly supported their membership bids. But at the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, member countries declined requests by both countries to begin the process of accession . . . .” Complete story: http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-09-04-voa57.cfm


POV: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 22nd season on PBS, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September
with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV 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](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

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**DVD REQUESTS:** Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.