

Life Lessons in The Waiting Room

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - A new, critically acclaimed documentary shows what it's like being in a hospital emergency room for people who most likely won't be able to pay for their medical care.

"The Waiting Room" portrays a day inside a large public hospital, and focuses on the patients' stories and the doctors and nurses who care for them.

Although the film is set at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California, director Peter Nicks says the experiences of the staff and families seeking care are universal.

"The system was broken but the people were not. The caregivers and the patients were a collection of remarkable human beings that were just trying to get by."

In the 24 hours documented in the film, the hospital staff sees 241 patients, most of them uninsured.

Nicks, whose wife works at the hospital where the documentary was filmed, says the idea was to simply ask people, "What are you waiting for?" and gather their stories. They soon found that the drama and decisions made there mirror what's going on in America.

"We're grappling with major policy challenges, from health care to the economy, to immigration, to violence. These stories that gathered and passed through the waiting room really touched on a lot of those significant issues."

Nicks says he wasn't interested in pointing fingers at the health-care system, and chose instead to allow the audience simply to overhear the stories that played out in the hospital.

"The Waiting Room" will be part of the ninth annual Documentary Film Festival this weekend at the Capitol Theater, 206 Fifth Ave. S.E., Olympia. It opens nationally in mid-March.

The film's website is whatruwaitingfor.com.