

New doccIE features junior doctors' working conditions in SA

A new documentary, *Doc-U-Mentally - last doctors standing* covers the gruelling pressures that more than 5,000 junior South African doctors face in their working conditions.



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The 82-minute film will be released in South Africa in September 2016 and has also been entered into several international film festivals, including the Public Health Film Festival in the UK and the Denver Film Festival in the US.

South African born Francois Wahl, a chartered accountant with a passion for filmmaking, directed and produced the film. He believes this is an apt title as “junior doctors must be insane to work under the conditions they do.

“I was inspired to tell the story after experiencing almost first-hand what these young doctors go through. My father, wife, brother and many of my friends are in the healthcare profession and the effects of sleep deprivation and the hostile environment they have to work in have damaging repercussions – and this is that I wanted to bring home to the viewer.

“The film shows five different doctors from vastly diverse backgrounds, during five different calls, with very little director’s influence from my side, as I wanted to produce an unadulterated film, showing things the way they are. The main focus was to show the race against time for these doctors and how working 30-hour shifts affects their mood, performance, stress and anxiety levels and personal safety.”

Reality is gritty

The movie, which is set mainly at Ngwelezane Hospital in Empangeni (KwaZulu-Natal), is not for the faint-hearted and shows real-life scenes of stab-wounds, gashes that must be sown up, near drownings, and everything in between that junior doctors need to deal with during a regular shift.

It features Dr Saishrien Rasen in the surgery unit, Dr Yenziwe Ngema in orthopaedics, Dr Wanele Ganya in paediatrics, Dr Amy Salvesen in emergency medicines and Dr Lourens Wahl in casualty.

Their participation in the film was motivated by both a professional and personal responsibility in order to lead the change especially in working hours but also to shed light on the psychology behind the plight of junior doctors. In addition, it brings to the fore other issues that need to be addressed, such as the shortage of medical personnel and the HIV dangers they face.

Crowdfunding contributed to filmmaking

The documentary also drew the interest of Pharma Dynamics, a South African generic pharmaceutical firm that, along with the support from the SA Medical Association (SAMA), KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission and funds raised by fellow doctors via a crowdfunding campaign, made the documentary a reality.

Mariska van Aswegen, spokesperson for Pharma Dynamics says junior doctors are the hard-working backbone and future of South Africa's healthcare system and more should be done to ensure safer working conditions.

"With each passing year, junior doctors are given more responsibility. Working long and anti-social hours causes physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, which often puts doctors (and their patients) in perilous situations. One can understand the anger and frustration felt by many junior doctors at this time and hopefully the film will encourage other legislatures to follow in the footsteps of Western Cape, Health MEC Nomafrrench Mbombo's recent decision to reduce the working hours of healthcare professionals in the province from 30 hour shifts to 24 hour calls," she says.

Show times

Doc-U-Mentally will be screened at both the upcoming Jozi and UGU Film Festivals (KZN) on 17-18 September 2106. Show times are as follows:

Jozi Film Festival:

- Eyethu Lifestyle Centre, Soweto – Saturday 17 September at 2pm
- Rosebank Cinema Nouveau – Sunday 18 September at 12pm

UGU Film Festival:

- Desroches Hotel – Saturday 17 September at 2.30pm

For a sneak preview, click [here](#).

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