

## Chicago filmmaker sheds light on hospital billing practices

BY ALEX PARKER

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When Rebecca Schanberg's documentary, "Do No Harm," debuts in Chicago tomorrow night, she says people might wish they had not seen it.

"One person said to me, 'I really wish I hadn't seen this,'" she says.

The film tells the story of two Albany, Ga., men, physician John Bagnato and accountant Charles Rehberg, who in 2003 blew the whistle on their local hospital, Phoebe Putney. They accused the hospital of overcharging poor people, forcing many into bankruptcy.

The hospital denies those claims.

But, Schanberg, 37, says is that the practice is widespread - especially in Illinois.

"I thought the doctors knew about what happened once their patients walked out the door, but they have no idea," says Schanberg, a Chicago resident who also calls New York home.

The film premiered at the Little Rock Film Festival last week, and was nominated for best documentary.

The Daily News asked Schanberg about her interest in the story, and what people in Chicago will take away from it.

### **What is this film about?**

The film is really about two men in Albany, Ga., a small southern town, who found their non-profit hospital was overcharging poor people and sending them into bankruptcy. They found it was all over the place in hospitals, including Illinois.

This was really the largest employer in the entire area, and people really didn't want to believe for a long time that this was happening there.

### **What will the average person in Chicago take away from the film?**

These guys had no reason to do this. The numbers were really, really staggering. When they first showed me their presentation, they were showing me how much money they were talking about...It was just sitting there.

All of these hospitals were supposed to be taking care of poor people, and they weren't. It's one of these things, hospitals are supposed to be taking care of you.

### **How do you hope people will react to "Do No Harm"?**

I think our biggest hope is that people get really angry about what's going on at their local, non-profit hospitals. We actually mention Northwestern in the film, and how they've redone their campus in the last 10 years. People won't believe how much money we're talking about. A billion dollars to redo their campus, with less than 2 percent for charity care.

### **What surprised you while doing this film?**

There are so many things that are so shocking. One of them is that the hospital works very hard to not let anybody know what they're doing. (The hospital) really went after these guys. I guess in a way I also expected (the hospital) to be open in talking to us, but they refused to do that. They really didn't want to tell their side of the story.

I was so shocked that they had taken care of their town that way.

When we show the film, people's reactions -- one person said to me, "I really wish I hadn't seen this."

I didn't want to know what was happening at Northwestern. I mean, I had my babies there.

I thought the doctors knew about what happened once their patients walked out the door, but they have no idea.

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"Do No Harm" shows tomorrow night at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago. The showing is closed to the public, and the film will be introduced by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, who has championed against unfair billing practices.

There is a panel discussion following the film, featuring Schanberg, renowned Chicago physician Quentin Young, Mark Rukavina, executive director of The Access Project and Donna Smith, founder of American Patients United.

Daily News Staff Writer Alex Parker covers public health. He can be reached at 773.362.5002, ext. 17, or alex [at] chitowndailynews [dot] org.