



Award-winning documentary feature film highlighting Australian hero medics to air on 7TWO in global first

Tuesday 7 July 2020: The never-before-seen on TV director's cut feature-length film of the award-winning documentary The Surgery Ship will air for the first time anywhere in the world on 7TWO this Sunday, 12 July at 12pm.

Featuring 24 minutes of additional footage and previously unaired patient and volunteer stories, the feature-length documentary was filmed in Guinea, West Africa and follows life aboard the world's largest non-governmental hospital ship, the MV Africa Mercy.

One of those patient stories cut from the original documentary and seen here for the first time is that of Alya Camera, a young boy with a tumour that impacts his airway and threatens to suffocate him within just weeks. Alya is successfully operated on by Dr Neil Thomson in a procedure that literally saves the child's life.

The Africa Mercy's volunteers face profound professional and emotional challenges like Alya's as they attempt to treat curious diseases they've seldom seen outside their textbooks. Health conditions such as benign tumours, cleft palates and bowlegs, that in the Western World would be treated early, are commonplace in Africa and often left unchecked for decades, leaving people to suffer unnecessarily.

More than 70% of the world's population is unable to access essential surgery, according to the Lancet's study on access to surgical care. As a result, more than 17 million people die needlessly each year, and many common, treatable illnesses become life-threatening.

The Surgery Ship features several Australian medical volunteers including plastic surgeon Nerida Moore from Yowie Bay in New South Wales, ENT surgeon Neil Thomson from Gosford, NSW, Cairns physiotherapist Nick Veltjens, and nurse Deb Loudon from Toowoomba, Queensland.

The documentary was made with the support of Screen Australia and Screen NSW. Produced by the award-winning team at Media Stockade in Sydney, the film is an uncompromising look at the consequences of lives lived without access to modern medicine and the ethical challenges in trying to help.

On location in Guinea, director Madeleine Hetherington and her crew were embedded with the Africa Mercy team, documenting the powerful and inspirational stories of both patients and healers. Some of the stories end in triumph, others in tragedy as the doctors must explain to their patients that nothing can be done for their terminal conditions.

Hetherington observes, "This is a story about the challenges of giving aid. There are brutal limits to what it can achieve. The line of patients at its door is unending. The ethics of who to choose for surgery and who is not is harrowing."

"Despite these complications, The Surgery Ship is also a story about the everyday heroism of both Africans and the volunteers, and the human drive to rise above circumstances, to survive, and give the best of ourselves - even when there seems no end in sight. At its heart, this is a positive film; in it, we see people who are seeking to make a difference. It is an outward looking-story about how we can engage with the world."

The Surgery Ship airs on 7TWO at 12pm on Sunday, 12 July and encores at 2.30pm on Wednesday, 15 July.

Watch the trailer at https://youtu.be/l_5Rei4jFeA

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About Mercy Ships

Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to deliver free, world-class health care services, capacity building and sustainable development aid to those without access in the developing world. Founded in 1978, Mercy Ships has worked in more than 70 countries providing services valued at more than \$1.3

billion, with more than 2.7 million direct beneficiaries. Each year, more than 1,200 volunteers from over 40 nations serve with Mercy Ships. Professionals including surgeons, dentists, nurses, health care trainers, teachers, cooks, seamen, engineers, and agriculturalists donate their time and skills to the effort. Mercy Ships seeks to transform individuals and strengthen health care systems throughout Africa. For more information, visit www.mercyships.org.au

Notes to Editors

High resolution photos of the hospital ship, volunteers, and patients are available upon request, with attribution to Mercy Ships.

For an interview with the Mercy Ships volunteers featured in *The Surgery Ship*, please contact Melissa Mason directly on 07 5437 2992 or melissa.mason@mercyships.org

For an interview with *The Surgery Ship* producer/director Madeleine Hetheron, please contact Madeleine directly on 0408 622 203 or info@mediastockade.com.

For more information, please contact:

Melissa Mason
National Office Manager
Mercy Ships Australia
07 5437 2992
melissa.mason@mercyships.org

Contacts

Melissa Mason
07 5437 2992
[mailto: melissa.mason@mercyships.org](mailto:melissa.mason@mercyships.org)