

“The Healthcare Divide”

There are many challenges in the American society that effect lives and businesses that we may need to survive in life. In some point in a person’s life, they may need to go to a hospital. However, what happens when they are low income and uninsured? With the rapid change in society with competition between safety net hospitals, which are for the low income and uninsured, and the for-profit hospitals, the safety net hospitals could potentially go away for good. In “The Healthcare Divide”, narrated by Laura Sullivan, she uses statistics, Interviews, and history to propose that safety net hospitals need to have dramatic changes in their system, as well as changes in how much money they receive by government officials.

“The Healthcare Divide” starts out with a family in the emergency room with their sickly family member on the other side of a glass wall, lying on the bed with little to no hope of surviving. The family then must call the dying family member and tell them that they love her before they run out of time with them. We find out early on that during the pandemic, hospitals were going through a struggling with the number of patients that had to be cared for. However, we find out that Safety net hospitals must care for the patients that the other hospitals will not admit into their facility. With that being said, Safety net hospitals do not make a lot of profit from patients due to the low income or patients with no insurance. Even before covid they were struggling to make profits, so when the pandemic hit it worsened. Frontline and NPR try to figure out why that is that safety net hospitals are not preforming well, and they go to Erlanger for majority of the answers for this case. Erlanger helps the community that it is around, since most of the people are low income and uninsured, however they do not benefit from them and they try to attract people that can pay for treatment into their establishment, which ultimately fails. Erlanger kept losing money and was on the brick of closing for good, but they did end up

changing up how they ran the place and they started expanding. With the expansion though, they kept attracting the wrong crowd, so it never really worked out. When a private equity business started rising, particularly one named “Prospect” from California, they started buying out safety net hospitals and changing the way they did things. Although they thought they were doing a good job, they were only trying to gain money from the businesses they bought so they did not care for the actual establishment itself. A lot of safety nets gave in to Prospect so they wouldn’t go out of business (Erlanger was considering if it no change happened), but some didn’t in hopes that sooner or later, change would happen. The government gives some money to safety nets, but they also give some to the for profits which only keeps the division of business the same. It is told towards the end of the story, that if there is not a change in the way safety net hospitals are cared for by the money (By funding for the most part) the divide will only get bigger to the point where it is not fixable.

The rhetorical situation of this movie is heavily contributed by the different interviews regarding the circumstances of the safety net hospitals. The purpose of the film was to educate us about the power imbalance between the for-profit hospitals and the safety net hospitals, which it does very well through interviews between different levels of status within the hospitals. Normally with some interviews, they only go to one person about a certain subject, however in this case, they went to multiple people to get different perspectives on the general topic and to really see how people felt about the situations they were put in. Although the safety nets as a whole were struggling for the same reason, which was funding, different places were affected in different ways. For example, the reverend at the church stated that most of his church people were going in and out of the hospital which could mean there was a lack of treatment or lack of availability (this hospital was also taken over by prospect). Erlanger’s “Medico” clinic never

faced that problem, but they did struggle to bring in their target audience to help pay for their facility and keep them in business. The film shows how different communities are reacting to the struggles of safety net hospitals with both the same and different variables causing them to struggle.

Another major component of this film was the representation of statistics throughout the entire film. When ever they were being compared to other hospitals, mainly for-profit hospitals, they have statistics and numbers to compare them. This was shown when they looked through Erlanger's data base to find out how much supplement funds they were receiving getting back in profit, and they saw that for profit companies were receiving more even though they did not need it as bad as the safety net. The reason being is simply to further show the division in for-profit hospitals and safety nets by showing the data throughout a certain time period. When shown the statistics, it better illustrates the point that safety nets need to have more change because of how much they are underperforming compared to the for-profit hospitals.

Not only is the film talking about the present and how it needs change, but the film also goes back in time and talks about the hospitals back then to show how much is embedded in hospital practice now. During the film, it has stated that even back then when there were less hospitals and private owners. They were still trying to achieve the same thing as private own equities are doing in the present day of the film. This is because the investors who own the private equities all want one thing, and that is money. The only way to get money is by taking out the competition by buying the competition and expanding out.

The film "The Healthcare Divide" is very effective in informing the audience of the struggles of safety net hospitals and gives examples of why the way that the government funds them needs to be altered to keep their business afloat. Due to the competition of the for-profit

hospitals, safety nets are struggling to keep up, as stories were told through the interviews in the film and by seeing the statistic comparing the two different types of hospitals. Even through history, the two hospitals started to divide and the gap between them only got larger and larger, and this film is very effective with talking about it as well as listening to the voices of the people going through that struggling and how they are trying to get through the difficult times with little to no help or options.