

HEART TO HEART

a proposal for a short documentary film
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Rationale

In 2016, a 3-day-old girl was discharged from Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital with a needle left in her chest. You would think that this would be country wide news, however it never spread beyond the Tampa Bay and St. Petersburg area. In fact, most of, if not all of the coverage was done by the Tampa Bay Times. If this was a small local hospital, that would be understandable, however, parents from all over the country take their children to this hospital because of the prestige behind the Johns Hopkins name, only to be left with heartbreak.

I am proposing that this story be a one-hour PBS FRONTLINE Documentary. As the newspaper industry has been steadily declining over the years, social media, the internet, and televised news stations have become hotspots for those looking to consume their news. The average audience for FRONTLINE is younger men and women aged 35-49, which is younger than the average for PBS and for other news organizations ("The FRONTLINE Audience"). Therefore, not many people are consuming their news through the newspaper, especially the younger generation, which is why bringing it onto a platform that they are more inclined to partake in would benefit the story greatly.

By bringing this story to a wider audience outside of the local area, it would bring awareness to parents, especially those with young children that need to undergo not only heart operations but any life saving operations. It also shows that just because a hospital is branded with a title as prestigious as Johns Hopkins, doesn't always mean it's the best option.

Treatment

In 1926, All Children's Hospital opened in St. Petersburg, Florida. It began as a hospital for crippled kids, however, throughout the decades, it slowly turned into a locally run, profitable children's hospital. As executives of the hospital wanted to expand its profile, Johns Hopkins acquired All Children's Hospital in 2011 and many believed that this partnership would greatly improve the hospital's reputation. However, after going through changes in leadership and chief staff, the Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital's reputation began to plummet.

Between 2016 and 2017, at least 11 patients died after undergoing surgeries at the hospital. In 2017, the death rate had sharply increased, and state investigations began. What they would find is a string of medical negligence in the form of improper sanitary conditions of the rooms and medical equipment, improper surgical techniques, and non-communication between patient (and in a majority of these cases the patient's parents) and surgeon.

Kathleen McGrory is the Deputy investigations editor at the *Times*. All the articles published about the hospital were edited by her. She says, "The most striking revelation, I think, was that the hospital knew about the problems for more than a year before they stopped one of the surgeons from operating at the hospital..." ("Times' investigative team exposes big Problems at the Heart Institute inside Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital."). This story started as a tip and turned into a huge story that took over 2 years to fully cover.

Dr. James Quintessenza is the hospital's current heart surgeries chief surgeon and co-director. He explains his role in the department and history with the hospital. He had been with the department and the hospital for almost two decades before being demoted and eventually pushed out of the system after Johns Hopkins had taken over the hospital ("Top heart surgeon returns to All Children's, 3 years after being pushed out"). He says that he is "delighted to be returning home to John Hopkins All Children's Hospital" ("Top heart surgeon returns to All Children's Hospital, 3 years after being pushed out").

Since Dr. Quintessenza had left the department, the mortality rate for children undergoing surgeries at All Children's Hospital had increased drastically. The hospital was on its way to having the highest mortality rate in the United States for heart surgeries ("Despite Warnings, All Children's Kept Operating. Babies Died.").

The major event that led to the first state investigation was the case of Katelynn Whipple. Katelynn was only 3 days old

when she required open heart surgery. The surgery went well, and Katelynn recovered. It was when she came back to the hospital for her follow up that a physician noticed something was off with her x-rays.

Amara Le and Joshua Whipple sit down in their home with the Tampa Bay Times and recount the scary events that took place while their then 3-day-old child, Katelynn was discharged from the hospital with a needle left in her chest. Her parents say that "they did not find out [about the needle] until a follow-up visit at a doctor's office, and when they returned to the hospital, the surgeon said it didn't exist." ("All Children's Never Told State about Needle Left in Baby."). While medical equipment being left in patients undergoing surgical operations has happened before (although it can be quite serious and should theoretically never happen because nurses count every needle and instrument before every procedure), when they are discovered the findings are brought forward to the patient and other medical procedures are offered to remove it as soon as possible. In the case of Katelynn, when the needle was discovered, they spoke to the lead surgeon to have it removed. He insisted there was no needle left behind. The family had to go to a different hospital to have it removed.

Eventually the federal government opened an investigation on the hospital. Along with 2 incidents of needles being left in patients' chests (one of these cases being Katelynn's), the hospital also violated Florida law ("All Children's Hospital now under federal review"). After this federal review, All Children's Hospital was hit with fines that eventually added up to \$804,000. The hospital also had to pay "nearly \$43 million in settlements with the families of children who dies or were hurt in the unit" ("Johns Hopkins All Children's faces record state fines").

Resource Page

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McGrory, Kathleen, and Neil Bedi. "Johns Hopkins All Children's Faces Record State Fines." *Tampa Bay Times*, Tampa Bay Times, 6 Sept. 2019, www.tampabay.com/investigations/2019/09/07/johns-hopkins-all-childrens-faces-record-state-fines/.

Interviews

- Kathleen McGrory
 - Deputy investigations editor at the *Times*. She continually covered all the events relating to the hospital.

- Amara Le and Joshua Whipple
 - Parents of the 3-day-old child that was left with a needle in her chest after surgery.
- Dr. James Quintessenza
 - The All Children's Hospital current heart surgery's chief surgeon and co-director

Locations

- The Whipple residence
- The outside of the John Hopkin All Children's Hospital
- The cubicle of Kathleen McGrory at the Tampa Bay Times office