



Sicko

2007

Tagline: *This might hurt a little*

Directed by: Michael Moore

Stars: Michael Moore, Tony Benn, Reggie Cervantes, John Graham, William Maher, Linda Peeno

Length: 123 minutes



In a nutshell

Documentary rabble rouser Michael Moore delves in to the American health care system, throwing up shocking facts about evil HMO's (Health Maintenance Organizations, or health insurance companies) who maximise profits by refusing treatment to their customers.



Heartbreaking stories are told about people who thought their medical insurance would cover them for treatment like cancer, brain tumours and respiratory diseases caused by volunteering at Ground Zero for months and the US setup is compared to the free healthcare provided by Canada, France, the UK and even Cuba. Ever willing to pull stunts, Moore takes a convoy of sufferers on a boat to Guantanamo Bay to demand the same treatment as “the evil doers” incarcerated within.

Opinion

A new Michael Moore film is always an event, and though there will always be those who protest against him, the facts in *Sicko* are hard to argue with. A man cuts two fingers off with a saw and has to choose which one he can afford to get sewn back on - the cheapest is \$12,000. A 79-year-old man works cleaning a supermarket, forced to stay on so that he and his wife can get the medication they need. A mother rushes her sick baby girl to the nearest hospital to be told her insurance company will only pay if she goes to a different hospital - doctors stand by as her child dies.

Moore has aimed this film squarely at Americans who have health insurance and watch the TV news, and it shows. Not only does he explode myths about so-called “socialised medicine”, dubbed as evil by the US media but clearly working well in other countries, but he takes the time to explain that French people aren’t all America-haters, Cuba isn’t a third world country and British doctors don’t live in scummy flats (the marvellous Tony Benn pops up in the UK section of the film to impart his trademark sage common sense - always a treat). The hero angle so loved by patriotic Americans is exploited by showing the plight of some 9/11 rescue workers refused proper treatment for respiratory diseases and post traumatic stress because they weren’t officially employed by the City of New York at the time. Cue a trip to Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners apparently enjoy excellent healthcare.

Here lies my only problem with this film. As Moore sails into the bay, megaphone in hand, asking for treatment for his group, he glosses over the fact that the unit at Guantanamo contains people who have not been charged with any crimes and who are systematically tortured. I don’t expect this film to veer away from its primary goals and topics, but it’s grossly disrespectful to bring Guantanamo in to the equation, depict it as a good place to be because of its healthcare facilities and denounce every detainee as an “evil doer”, especially when your audience is the uninformed American public. Clearly Moore’s point is to show the ridiculousness of a situation where law-abiding patriotic Americans who pay for health insurance can’t get treated for serious illnesses when prisoners can, but it leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

Aside from this, *Sicko* is a very well presented and powerful attack on the failing American health care system. We can only hope for any positive effect it can have on the way things are done in the US but, for everyone enjoying the luxury of a free healthcare system elsewhere, it should encourage serious gratitude.

Facts

- The owner of the biggest anti-Michael Moore website had decided to close it down when his wife fell ill, so he could use the money to pay her medical bills. Moore didn't agree that the man should have to choose between helping his wife and running him into the ground, so he sent him an anonymous cheque for \$12,000 to cover the medical bill. Apparently Moore called the website owner to tell him the truth before *Sicko* went to Cannes Film Festival but got his voicemail. When he tried again, his called ID had been blocked.
- The anti-Moore filmmakers have already got started - filming is currently underway for *Sick And Sicker*, a documentary slamming Canadian healthcare.

Laura Kidd

Laura saw this film courtesy of The Ritzy, Brixton.

