

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES ROUND TABLE
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Film Review

¡Salud! Directed by Connie Field. Produced by Connie Field and Gail Reed

Run time: 93 minutes+ www.saludthefilm.net \$35.00 for elementary, high school and public libraries

These days, the necessity for national universal health insurance is resonating among the U.S. people, as well as the Democratic candidates for president. *¡Salud!* (Health!), a film about the Cuban approach to public health and the role of Cuban doctors abroad, will be a stimulating addition to your DVD collection -- right there along with *Sicko*. In the interest of full disclosure, I must reveal that the film's American producer, Gail Reed, is an old friend of mine. But I doubt that she has friends on ALA's Notable Videos for Adults Committee, which named *¡Salud!* an ALA 2008 Notable Video for Adults. Only 15 films made the list.

¡Salud! posits a global health care system, community-based, and envisioned as a human right rather than a market commodity. It examines by what means this can be achieved, by even the world's poorest nations. Ironically, Cuba's ability to export medical services, as well as train indigenous health practitioners plays an important role in the island's sustainability in a world of increasing privatization of public services and resources. In the case of Venezuela, reciprocity is expressed in more favorable rates for oil, which has been a boon to the Cuban economy.

It might surprise some Americans to know that health care is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Article 25, Sec. 1. <http://www.unhcr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>). This is not an unrepresented idea even in the capitalist countries of Europe, as anyone who viewed *Sicko* knows. But the Cuban doctors serving around the world in underdeveloped countries have raised the discussion to another level: upwards of 40,000 Cuban health professionals staff public health facilities in some of the world's poorest countries. The first segment of the film focuses on The Gambia, South Africa, Honduras and Venezuela, exploring, respectively, four different issues of global health: government public health campaigns and how they might be implemented; the "brain drain" of health professionals from the poorer to the richer nations; responses to disasters; and the role of health care in a nation undergoing profound social change.

So, Cuban doctors serve in many countries. But Cuban doctors cannot stay away from home forever, and the only realistic goal is for nations to have sufficient medical personnel and facilities to serve the health needs of the population on a community-based and preventive care basis. How can this be done? This is the subject of another segment of the film. Cuban health professionals, backed by the government, are helping to set up medical schools in poor countries so that new doctors can be educated for practice in their own countries. These schools, now established in South Africa, The Gambia, and Venezuela, are based on the exemplary Latin American Medical School (ELAM) in Havana -- now the largest the medical school in the world. At ELAM students from underdeveloped countries study for free— including more than 100 low-income young people from the United States who attend on full scholarship. When they become doctors after their six-year program, hopefully all will -- including those selected from the U.S. -- fulfill their commitment to serve in underserved communities of their homelands.

For a documentary, this is a long film but don't let the length scare you. Like *Sicko*, it never drags. Academy award nominee Connie Field, who directed *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980) and the civil rights landmark film, *Freedom on My Mind* (1994), has done an equally arresting job with *¡Salud!* As your library users think about the role of our government in assuring healthcare for all, this film will widen the debate to what it would take to make this a reality worldwide on our increasingly health-threatened planet.

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