

AHCJ AWARD WINNER: FIRST PLACE, TV

POLIO FIGHT WINS THE PRIZE FOR RLTV

'Healthline Presents' Documentary Explores a Hard-Won Postwar Battle

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

Every year since 2004, the Association of Health Care Journalists has honored the best in health care reporting at its annual gathering.

This year's first-place winner in the television category was a segment of "Healthline Presents" on Retirement Living TV (RLTV). "Polio Revisited" examined the highly infectious viral disease that, before the advent of a vaccine, caused paralysis and in some cases death for thousands of people, nationally and internationally.

The show profiled survivors and victims of the disease, the vaccines and their creators, the genuine risk that polio presents today for American children who aren't immunized and the challenge of post-polio syndrome.

"We really backed into this documentary," said "Healthline" executive producer David Wasser. "We had decided to do an episode on post-polio syndrome, a condition that can impact those who thought they had recovered from the crippling effects of the disease."

While producing that episode, Mr. Wasser realized they had a wealth of material, including rare archival footage, that simply would not fit



TIME TRIP "Polio Revisited" featured rare archival footage of the quest to find a cure for the disease.

into a typical episode of "Healthline."

"We also were made aware of the medical community's concern for the increasing number of children who are not vaccinated against polio," Mr. Wasser said. "Since our audience (adults age 50-plus) lived through this terror, they are in a perfect position to remind their adult children about 'the bad old days' and encourage them to vaccinate their kids. It's a natural inter-generational call to action. The stakes are so high that I felt compelled to bring this project to fruition."

In their comments about "Polio Revisited," the AHCJ judges wrote, "This riveting docu-

mentary takes us back to the days before the development in the early 1950s of the polio vaccine. With heartbreaking archival footage, it shows the fear that gripped families as the number of polio cases continued to mount after World War II."

Depicted in that archival footage was the role the March of Dimes played in finding the cure, as well as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's battle with the disease and its aftermath.

"This project was filled with surprises, but perhaps the biggest was finding out that there are still a handful of people living in iron lungs," Mr. Wasser said. "We were fortunate to interview Diane Odell, who had contracted polio at age 3 and had spent the past 57 years in an iron lung. She managed to accomplish so much even though she was confined to the device, and was an inspiration to so many people."

Sadly, Ms. Odell didn't live long enough to see the finished project. She died before editing was completed. "I'm very thankful she was able to share her story, but regret she didn't get to see the completed version," Mr. Wasser said.

When informed that RLTV had won the top prize from AHCJ, Mr. Wasser said he was surprised. "There are so many great health stories being produced these days, so I was a little stunned," he said. "It's a special honor to be recognized by one's peers." ■



RURAL FOCUS
Al Jazeera English Television's award-winning "Health Care USA" paid special attention to health care in sparsely populated areas.

AHCJ AWARD WINNER: SECOND PLACE, TV

CARE-LESS IN THE U.S.

Al Jazeera Report Takes an In-Depth Look at the Country's Uninsured and Underinsured

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

At Health Journalism 2009 in Seattle this week, the Association of Health Care Journalists will be presenting awards in 11 categories honoring the best in health care reporting.

Al Jazeera English Television received the second-place prize in the television category for "Health Care USA," a beautifully shot

report examining the state of American health care with a special focus on rural communities. Al Jazeera looked deeply into the uninsured and the underinsured, and how those individuals dealt with medical issues on a daily basis.

The idea for the show came from a widely publicized 2008 Harvard study that identified two

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AHCJ AWARDS: THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH CARE JOURNALISM

Awards will be presented at a luncheon April 18 at Health Journalism 2009.

TV

First place: David Wasser, Alissa Collins Latenser and Don Kaiser, Retirement Living TV, "Healthline Presents: Polio Revisited"
Second place: Hanaan Sarhan, Mat Skene and Avi Lewis, Al Jazeera English Television, "Healthcare USA"
Third place: Betty Ann Bowser, Bridget Desimone and Jenny Marder, "The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer," "Talking About the End"

Radio

First place: Kelley Weiss, Joe Barr and Paul Conley, Capital Public Radio, "Prescription Drugs at the Swap Meet"
Second place: Sarah Varney, KQED, "Chemicals at Home: Searching for Safe Alternatives"

Third place: David Baron, WGBH/PRI's The World, "Delivering AIDS Drugs—The Long Journey"
Honorable mention: Patricia Nazario and Cheryl Devall, KPCC/Southern California Public Radio, "Her Three Sons"

Online

First place: M.B. Pell, Jim Morris and Jillian Olsen, Center for Public Integrity, "Perils of the New Pesticides"
Second place (tie): Tara Parker-Pope, New York Times, "Well" blog
Second place (tie): Scott Hensley, Jacob Goldstein and Sarah Rubenstein, Wall Street Journal Online, Wall Street Journal Health Blog
Third place: Randy Dotinga, Voice of San Diego, "Suicide Magnet"

Trade

First place: Paul Goldberg, the Cancer Letter, "Conflicts of Interest in Lung Cancer Study"
Second place: Mark Taylor, Hospitals & Health Networks, "The

Billion Dollar U-Turn"

Third place: Howard Larkin: Hospitals & Health Networks, "Your Future Chief of Staff?"

Beat Reporting

First place: Clark Kauffman, Des Moines Register
Second place: Carol Smith, Seattle Post-Intelligencer
Third place: Angie C. Marek, SmartMoney magazine

Large Newspapers

First place: Diane Suchetka, Cleveland Plain Dealer, "Fixing Mr. Fix-It"
Second place (tie): James Drew and Fred Schulte, Baltimore Sun, "In Their Debt"
Second place (tie): Staff, New York Times, "The Evidence Gap"
Third place (tie): Lee Hancock and Sonya N. Hebert, Dallas Morning News, "At the Edge of Life"
Third place (tie): Spotlight team, Boston Globe, "The Partners Effect"

Medium Newspapers

First place: Luis Fabregas and Andrew Conte, Pittsburgh Tribune-

Review, "Transplanting Too Soon"
Second place: Carol Smith, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, "Dangerous and Mentally Ill"
Third place: Marshall Allen and Alex Richards, Las Vegas Sun, "The New Addiction"

Small Newspapers

First place: Greg Barnes, John Ramsey and John Fuquay, Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer, "What Lies Beneath"
Second place: Evan George, Los Angeles Daily Journal, "Systemwide Flaws Plagued Heparin Recall"
Third place: Sharon Salyer and Alejandro Dominguez, the Herald (Everett, Wash.), "Alone Among Us"

Large Magazines

First place: Mary Carmichael, Newsweek, "Growing Up Bipolar"
Second place: Frank Owen, Playboy, "The Medical Marijuana Murder"
Third place (tie): Annemarie Conte, Jessica Branch and Jennifer L. Cook, Good Housekeeping, "Rx for Disaster"
Third place (tie): Emily Chau,

Leslie Laurence and Julia Kagan, Ladies' Home Journal, "Women's 'Silent' Cancers/Harmful Hysterectomies"
Honorable mention: Jonathan Cohn, Self, "Insurance Denied"

Small Magazines

First place: John Carey, BusinessWeek, "Do Cholesterol Drugs Do Any Good?"
Second place: Katherine Eban and Jacob Lewis (editor), Conde Nast Portfolio, "Your Hospital's Deadly Secret"
Third place: David Wolman, Wired, "The Truth About Autism: Scientists Reconsider What They Think They Know"

Limited Report

First place: Jordan Rau, Los Angeles Times, "Hospital Mistakes Go Public"
Second place: Marshall Allen, Las Vegas Sun, "Providers Close Doors to Poor"
Third place: Justin Blum, Bloomberg News, "Tainted Imports Set Off Warnings, Not FDA Action"

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