

HANDLING THE HEART

'Postperfusion syndrome, also known as "pumpehead", is a constellation of neurocognitive impairments attributed to cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) during cardiac surgery ...'

- Wikipedia



INFORMATION KIT:

For all enquiries, please contact Ronin Films: admin@roninfilms.com.au

If this film raises issues for you, help and support are available.
Don't struggle alone. Please contact:

The Australian Centre for Heart Health's Cardiac Wellbeing Program
on **03 9326 8544** or by email at wellbeing@australianhearthealth.org.au

Or contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**

Principal Credits

HANDLING THE HEART:

adapted from the feature length documentary, **PUMPHEAD**,
by the same creative team

Directed, produced
and written by

Andrew Pike

with Editor

James Lane

Cinematographer

Zhenshi van der Klooster

Trio Elégiaque no 2,
Opus 9 by

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Arranged by

Chris Latham

Performed by:

Edward Neeman piano

Chris Latham violin

David Pereira cello

Music recordist
and sound mix

Tim Duck

Co-producer -

Mike Lynskey


Main Title
and Key Art design

Lee Whitmore

Produced with assistance from the ACT Screen Arts Fund
through Screen Canberra and the ACT Government



Produced with the support of Screen Australia
through the Producer Equity Program.

Financed with the assistance of
Documentary Australia 

27 minutes

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Synopses

Short synopsis:

An exploration of patient experiences following major heart surgery - how to understand them and live with them: a story of existential crises and transformative experiences, told by four ex-patients.

Longer synopsis:

Handling the Heart is a documentary exploring patient experiences following major heart surgery - how to understand these experiences and how to live with them.

Through the stories of four ex-patients, including the filmmaker himself, this documentary indicates the complex diversity of emotional and cognitive changes that often occur after open-heart surgery, simultaneous with physical recovery. In particular the film focuses on the phenomenon of "post-traumatic growth" which often co-exists with psychological challenges and is triggered by them.

All of the ex-patients in the film reveal aspects of "post-traumatic growth" - marked changes in personal values and priorities, life-style, creativity, and social and family relationships, leading to a life that in many cases is profoundly different from the time before surgery.

Through this composite story of existential crises and transformative experiences, the film also delves into the gulf that can exist between advances in medical science on one hand, and patient experiences on the other. In particular, the film raises the difficulties that the medical establishment often faces in responding to problems that are emotional, intangible and hard to quantify. As one ex-patient contemplates in the film, the "roller-coaster ride" that some patients experience after open-heart surgery is "invisible" to other people. The film is designed to make the "invisible" more apparent and to promote awareness, empathy and understanding.

The filmmaker, Dr Andrew Pike, is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who had open-heart surgery in 2011.

Biography:

Andrew Pike

The writer-director of **HANDLING THE HEART**, Andrew Pike, is a film distributor, film historian and documentary film-maker. He co-authored with Ross Cooper the seminal book, *Australian Film 1900-1977* (Oxford University Press). Andrew's company, Ronin Films, has distributed many Australian films including the feature films **STRICTLY BALLROOM** and **SHINE**. Today the company specialises in the distribution of social documentaries.

In 2003, the French government appointed him to the rank of Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres for his work in the distribution and exhibition of French cinema in Australia.

In 2007, Andrew Pike was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his services to the film industry, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Canberra.

From 2000 to 2003, Andrew served on the Council of the National Film and Sound Archive, then known as ScreenSound Australia. In 2008 he joined the Board of the newly created independent National Film and Sound Archive, and served until 2012.

In 2009 he began an on-going association with the Asia Pacific Screen Academy, initially as a Jury member in their annual Awards, and subsequently from 2010 to the present as Chair of the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund. This Fund has achieved an unusually high success-rate among the projects it has supported financially in the Asia-Pacific region, most notably Asghar Fahardi's Oscar-winning *A SEPARATION* (2011) from Iran.

As a documentary writer-director, his films include **ANGELS OF WAR** (1982, broadcast by ABC), **THE CHIFLEYS OF BUSBY STREET** (2008, released in cinemas), **EMILY IN JAPAN** (2009, broadcast by ABC and NITV), and **MESSAGE FROM MUNGO** (2014, released in cinemas and broadcast by NITV). His films have won many awards including the Australian Film Institute's award for Best Documentary for **ANGELS OF WAR**, and a United Nations Association Media Award for **MESSAGE FROM MUNGO**. He has also produced several documentaries for independent filmmakers including Gary Kildea and Chris Owen, and co-produced a feature documentary, **ACROSS THE PLATEAU** (2007), for Chinese director, Zhang Zeming, filmed in Tibet.

Filmmaker's statement

I made this film over a period of 6 years to explain, from a patient's perspective, what it feels like to have the Pumphead syndrome, the lay term for common experiences for many people following cardiac surgery, not only in the immediate post-surgery period, but often long-term.

I used my own experience as a patient, and the film-making skills I'd learned professionally to communicate the "inside" experience - what the pumphead syndrome feels like, day after day, month after month, year after year, relayed through my own story and through the stories of others who knew about it first-hand - patients, carers and cardiac rehabilitation experts.

I wanted the film to help other patients by letting them know they are not alone, and that their experience is common among post-surgical patients.

I wanted the film to communicate with medical professionals, whether cardiac specialists or general practitioners, to help them to be aware, to understand and to be able to respond more appropriately to patients who are experiencing the Pumphead syndrome.

I also wanted to raise a broader issue that affects all of us: medical science is giving humans the potential for longer lives, but we need medical science to pay heed to the quality of these longer lives, to embrace a fuller view of the needs of patients preparing for and recovering from major interventions. In the case of cardiac surgery patients, that means support beyond the realm of short-term hospital-based cardiac rehabilitation programs.

Another theme emerged as the filming progressed. I increasingly became aware of the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth among the patients whose stories I was recording, and the final third of the film came to focus on observations of growth and transformation, in all its myriad forms.

Ultimately, I wanted to see if I could make a film that could serve as a catalyst in promoting a cultural change in the way the health establishment and society in general regard the intangible spiritual and psychological dimensions of life-threatening disease and life-saving interventions.

Going on the road to film conversations with ex-patients was inevitably a therapeutic process for me personally. As the film progressed, I felt a growing sense of value in helping others to communicate with the “outside” world. All of the ex-patients in the film felt they had a lot to say, and were keen to express their feelings for the benefit of others, and that motivation gradually became my motivation too and affected the creative choices I made.

Through the making of the film I found new friends, new creative collaborators, and the process of filming and editing became intensely restorative. I’m immensely grateful to all of those who helped me in the journey, both personally and creatively, and who had faith in my vision for the film.

Andrew Pike, May 2022

The participants (in alphabetical order)



Lisette Breukink

You have to be your own manager of the process, because nobody will do that for you. ... I think we are really alone on this road and I would even go further, sometimes lonely.



Kerri Cargill

Work provides a lot of structure. It provides a lot of social interaction and opportunities. And it also was for me a very big part of my self-identity. So to have to create something totally different is quite a big process.



Dr Allan Coop

Society just isn't prepared for the fact that people are going to be living for an extra 20 or 30 years. After having confronted my own mortality, I feel that I have far more to contribute in any situation, and I feel compelled to do that.

The professional



Dr Barbara Murphy

Associate Director, Australian Centre for Heart Health

For heart patients, the emotional recovery is huge and it often goes undetected, unrecognised, and not supported. ... We've advanced the physical (surgery) and the technology so far, and yet a person can be left broken.

Dr Barbara Murphy PhD

Dr Barbara Murphy is Associate Director at the Australian Centre for Heart Health, where she has worked for over 20 years. Dr Murphy has over 30 years' experience in research and program development to support mental health recovery after heart attack and heart surgery. She is widely published on the topic of the 'cardiac blues' with over 100 publications in peer-reviewed journals, and regularly speaks at conferences, hospitals, and cardiac rehabilitation programs on post-event mental health recovery. Dr Murphy is an advisor to the Mental Health Professional Network (MHPN); Honorary Senior Fellow in the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne; and Honorary Associate Professor in the Faculty of Health at Deakin University.

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The Australian Centre for Heart Health

The Australian Centre for Heart Health is a not-for-profit charitable independent medical research institute based in Melbourne, Victoria. The Centre focusses on the psychological and social aspects of heart disease and runs Australia's only dedicated Cardiac Counselling Clinic to support the mental health recovery of cardiac event survivors and their families. Counselling is delivered by a team of registered cardiac psychologists and is available Australia-wide. The Centre also offers a range of telephone, online and print-based programs and resources to support people in their cardiac recovery. All services are offered at no cost, with counselling bulk-billed through Medicare. The Centre also conducts research and delivers health professional training programs.

The Centre receives no government funding to deliver its services and training. If you would like to contribute to the delivery of services and programs of the Centre, go to

www.australianhearthealth.org.au

or call **03 9326 8544**.

