

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## Columbia med students create documentary on homelessness

By Allyson Baker

Twelve Columbia medical students tried their hands at film direction last year when they produced a documentary on homeless people.

The second-year medical students at the University's College of Physicians and Surgeons and one student from the School of Public Health created a documentary exploring health care for the homeless.

The documentary, funded by donations from private foundations and Blue Cross, Blue Shield Inc., was a project for a class about patients' views of illness taught by Rita Charon, assistant professor of Clinical Medicine at Vanderbilt Clinic.

The piece, due to be distributed in the spring or summer of 1992, is 35 minutes long and was produced between January and April of 1990.

The idea for the documentary came from Brent Wise, a third-year medical student, who said he was "very shocked by the homeless [problem]."

Wise, who served as project coordinator and director, said he felt a need to inform doctors and health care professionals about the lack of health care available to the homeless. The other 12 students involved approached Wise with similar feelings.

Jone La Rovere, a third-year student who produced the documentary, said she became interested because Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital has a substantial "patient population of homeless people."

The first two months were devoted to researching the homeless problem, collecting statistics, and interviewing people in charge of providing New York's homeless with health

care.

The students then walked through city streets, interviewing homeless people about the state of their health care, Wise said.

Lonnie Gross and Jeff Maloney, of Metropolitan Pictures, a New York production company, acted as technical consultants for the students.

Gross said she felt that it was the “emotional [content] that was hard [during the course of filming].”

During the filming, the interviewers tried not to intrude into the lives of the subjects, she said.

According to Charon, the question of homelessness in New York is an important one because it deals with “a very fragile group” of people, who present “compelling problems for young doctors.”

The film, which will be distributed to all 126 of the nation’s medical schools and other members of the health and education community, accomplishes three things, she said.

The documentary teaches the history of homelessness, the results of it, and what can be done to help.

“They get bad diseases,” Charon said about the medical state of the homeless.

She and La Rovere said that problems such as tuberculosis, AIDS, and malnutrition affect much of the homeless community, and that treatment must be especially tailored to homelessness.

Wise said he has been approached by many people interested in the documentary, including a cable company.

Charon said that overall there was “more [to the story] than [the students] thought was there [initially].”