

# THE CHECKLIST EFFECT

## PRESS KIT

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DIRECTOR: Lauren Anders Brown

PRODUCER: Sarah Kessler

UK PREMIERE: Global Health Film Festival, November 2016

RUN TIME: 45 minutes

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TRAILER: <https://vimeo.com/183653186>

TWITTER: @ChecklistEffect [#TheChecklistEffect](https://twitter.com/ChecklistEffect)

FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/thechecklisteffect](https://facebook.com/thechecklisteffect)

# QUICK FACTS

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**The Checklist Effect  
reminds us that  
sometimes the greatest  
achievements in medicine  
don't involve scientific  
breakthroughs and flights  
of technological genius.  
They involve common  
sense and attention to  
detail and simple systems  
that make it easier for  
doctors and nurses to do  
their best.**

**”**

**Malcom Gladwell,  
journalist, author and speaker**

# LOGLINE

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Inspired by surgeon and author Atul Gawande's award-winning book *The Checklist Manifesto*, we took a camera into the most sacred hospital spaces to explore the challenges of safer safer on a global scale - and a seemingly-simple checklist that can make the difference between life and death.

# INTRODUCTION

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**“ The great success of The Checklist Effect is that it makes a scientific subject deeply personal and compelling to a global audience, in large part by creating a platform for local communities all over the world to tell their own stories. ”**

Gerri McHugh, Director, Global Health Film Initiative

Perhaps you've had surgery? (A lot of our cast and crew have - check the end credits!)

Perhaps you've watched a loved one disappear behind swinging OR doors. You didn't know what was going to happen back there - somehow put to sleep, somehow opened up and rearranged without pain, somehow woken up better - but you knew that either way the outcome would change your life forever.

Both scientific and deeply personal, The Checklist Effect is a feature length documentary for anyone who's ever had surgery, or loved someone who has. Up and down hospital corridors in snowy Moldova, the wide steppes of Mongolia, the red dust of Uganda, another rainy day in the U.K. - in all eight countries where we've filmed over the last two years - those muttered fears and wishes are the same.

A young Black child is shown from the chest up, wrapped in a teal-colored blanket. The child has short, dark hair and is looking down and slightly to the left. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Please let it  
work.  
And please  
let this  
extraordinary,  
downright  
bizarre,  
downright  
illegal-in-any-  
other-  
circumstance  
thing they're  
about to do  
to me, to her,  
to him, be  
safe.**

In a Guatemalan chapel, we meet an old doctor who carries the stories of dead patients like angry memento mori. He knows that in other circumstances, with the right resources, equipment and support, many would still be alive.

Over in the U.S., Atul Gawande takes the stage. A surgeon and author whose best-selling book *The Checklist Manifesto* inspired this film, he puts the global surgical safety crisis in context and introduces us to a seemingly-simple concept: the Checklist. It's a communication tool for reducing risk and complications, like the one that's made aviation safer than driving a car. Except when crisis strikes, for better or worse, a surgeon doesn't go down with their plane.

Wherever you are in  
the world, there's no  
such thing as a  
'routine operation.'



**“**

**Can you imagine being operated on in the middle of a power cut, where the room suddenly goes pitch black? The Checklist Effect brilliantly highlights some of the major challenges that surgical teams around the world face every day -- all the while making sure the human element isn't lost in the message. It's almost impossible to watch this film and not want to join in to help.**

**”**

**Karen Finn,  
journalist**



The Checklist Effect gets alongside the operating room table - a sacred and dramatic space - to show in each incision the story of a team working together to see a life. It's a bloody, complicated, heroic drama spanning politics, culture, economics, technologies - and it happens approximately 359 million times a year.

One day on location in Uganda we filmed an emergency Caesarean section in the morning and a wedding in the afternoon, 700 bodies dancing in the dusk. The Checklist Effect reminds us that we could all be patients one day - but equally that the point of an operation is, after all, to get back up. (And dance!)

# BIOGRAPHIES

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COLLABORATE

IDEAS & IMAGES

## **Collaborate: ideas & images**

Film Production Company

NYC, USA

In 2011 Lauren founded Collaborate: ideas & images - an NYC-based film production company delivering a wide variety of projects, from small PSAs and large budget commercials, to feature length films and documentaries. In 2014 Collaborate released The World Cup Project: an eleven-episode series showing how soccer is used as a tool for social development and change. With each episode filmed in a different country around the world, Lauren created, produced, shot - and at times directed and edited - the whole series. The World Cup Project was picked up and distributed by SnagFilms, and is available online.

In 2014, Lauren was recruited by Hôpital Albert Schweitzer to live in Haiti and create a series of fundraising and advocacy films about their life-saving work supporting healthcare in a low-resource community. At the same time, she was contacted by Sarah Kessler of Lifebox Foundation about filming their safer surgery and anesthesia programs - a project which ultimately grew into The Checklist Effect.

Over the last two years, Collaborate: ideas & images has developed an expertise in humanitarian advocacy and documentary work, with clients ranging from professional membership societies (the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists, the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists) to NGOs (medi for help, Saving Moses) and intergovernmental organizations (UNWRA).

## **Lifebox Foundation**

Producing partner, NGO

London, UK

Boston, USA



Lifebox is a leading international NGO making surgery safer in low-resource settings. Founded in 2011 by surgeon and bestselling author Atul Gawande, alongside four of the world's leading medical professional organizations, Lifebox has made surgery safer for more than 10 million patients worldwide.

Equipment, peer-to-peer education and long-term partnership are key to the Lifebox model of sustainable improvement in surgical and anesthesia safety. The NGO works with medical professional communities and champions in more than 100 countries, and you'll meet some in *The Checklist Effect*: local experts driving global change.

Lifebox grew directly out of work at the World Health Organization in the mid-2000s, as unsafe surgery was finally recognized as a global crisis.

But it's a complicated crisis, and too often, a silent one. Alongside life-changing programs, Lifebox advocates for safer surgery as a humanitarian priority. They were thrilled to meet Lauren: a talented director who saw the story to tell.

## **LEARN MORE...**

Lifebox's first and flagship program is best-known by a little yellow box: the Lifebox pulse oximeter. It's the only piece of equipment on the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist, the most important monitoring device in modern anesthesia. And it's missing from more than 70,000 ORs.

Lifebox is closing that gap, with an oximeter specially-chosen for the challenges of a low-resource hospital. It's robust, intuitive, uses rechargeable batteries and has a multi-language education tool.

Other programs include Clean Cut, targeting surgical site infection, and Human-Centered Design initiatives to scope vital technologies for low-resource settings - such as probes and a surgical instrument tray.

[lifebox.org](http://lifebox.org)

# LAUREN ANDERS BROWN, DIRECTOR

Lauren Anders Brown is an independent filmmaker with over ten years' experience in the film industry. In 2007 she joined the International Cinematographer's Guild and has since worked as a camera assistant on over a dozen TV shows and feature films, including Ugly Betty, Royal Pains, Nurse Jackie, The Blacklist, We Need To Talk About Kevin, and Argo. She now runs her own production company, Collaborate: ideas & images. Focusing on documentary films as director, producer, cinematographer, sound recorder and editor, she has carried her own equipment - weighing in at 29 kg - to more than 25 countries (and counting!) around the world.

When she's not behind a camera or in an airplane, you can find her at an independent coffee shop or on the soccer pitch.

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MEMORABLE MOMENT ON LOCATION: a lot of fond ones seem to be centered around soccer (football): from playing and scoring a penalty kick in Uganda, to attending a club match in little-traveled Transnistria, teaching a child in the steppes of Mongolia how to play the beautiful game, and having a kick about in Haiti with Canes after he recovered from his surgery. Canes' story will always be special to Lauren, not only because it was the first surgery she ever filmed (and will never forget the smell of burning skin being cut open for the first time) but also because Lauren donated blood on behalf of Canes in order for him to receive his operation.

# SARAH KESSLER, PRODUCER

A first time producer and full time Director of Communications and Strategic Partnerships for Lifebox Foundation, Sarah has been sharing stories of the global surgery crisis from the front line to the World Health Assembly since 2010.

She was Lifebox's first employee, helping to build a new organization into an international NGO, working with media outlets from BBC 's Health Check to Al Jazeera's The Cure to raise awareness of the issue.

Sarah has a background in literature from the University of Oxford, journalism from Columbia University School of Journalism, and health advocacy at the Guttmacher Institute. She was one of the inaugural Global Health Film Fellows in 2016.

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MEMORABLE MOMENT ON LOCATION: our fifth day in Uganda, when we managed to film a Caesarean section in the morning, and a wedding in the evening; a leap from life to love, in the company of so many generous people who allowed us in.

MEMORABLE MOMENT IN POST-PRODUCTION: showing it to a room full of global health experts for the first time and hearing them gasp and smile - we'd made a film that carried them beyond the statistics.

# POST-PRODUCTION

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**Kristopher Anderson**  
Visual Effects

Ten years experience in production and post production commercial, documentary, and journalism.

**MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT ON LOCATION:** Brain surgery; almost fainted when heard the bone chipping.

**MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN POST-PRODUCTION:** Finishing! Or "borrowing" hours of machine time from a friend's office to render the visual effects in time to deliver.



**Stephen Larosa**  
Music Composition

Composer and Brooklyn-native Stephen LaRosa scores music for film, animation, concert music, and commercials.

He studied at The Juilliard School and Il Conservatorio Di Milano under the tutelage of Gabriele Manca, Alessandro Solbiati, and Mario Garuti. Stephen's work has been performed in New York, Los Angeles, London, Milan, and Amsterdam. In 2010, he moved to Paris and founded Wonder Boy Audio.

When not scoring films, ads, or video games, Stephen geeks out on cinema, technology, philosophy, and cartoons. If you're lucky, you can catch him around NYC playing pirate shanties and experimental music.

**MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN POST-PRODUCTION:** living with 'C-section cringe' as part of daily life, until getting the score for that incredible scene just right, right at the end.



**Ari Winters**  
Sound Design

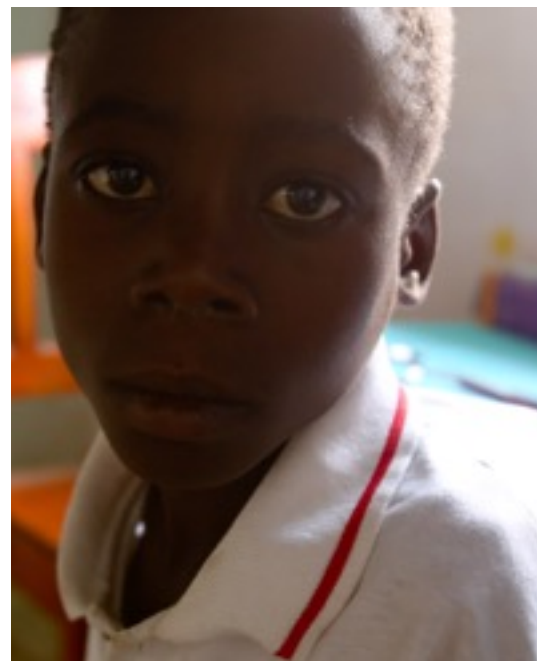
A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and the Entertainment Technology Center at CMU, Ari is a composer, sound designer, and Partner at Heavocity Media, Inc. and Heavy Melody Music & Sound Design. His music can be heard on Motion Picture and Game Trailers like Gone Girl, The Walking Dead, Seventh Son, Zero Dark Thirty and Dead Space 3. Ari's work also includes award winning virtual instrument libraries- DM-307, The AEON Collection, Damage, Evolve, Evolve Mutations, Evolve Mutations 2.

**MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN POST-PRODUCTION:** working hard to record the right 'beeps' with a Lifebox pulse oximeter in the studio-and much harder to get the U.K. interviewees up to the same sound level as the Americans.



# PRODUCTION STILLS

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# FAQ

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## 1 Where was *The Checklist Effect* filmed?

As far 'around the world' as we could make it without going full Jules Verne. Surgery is a global issue, and we wanted to show that landscapes might vary (beautifully!), but challenges in the OR - communication, education, politics - are often the same.

Over the course of 18 months, we managed to get our camera to: Guatemala, Haiti, Moldova, Mongolia, Uganda, Mexico, U.K. and the U.S.A., covering thousands of miles between us by plane, train, van, scooter, foot and horse (briefly).



Along the way we saw roughly 40 surgeries in 15 hospitals. More than 100 doctors, nurses, hospital managers, youth football players, drivers, fixers, chefs, pilots, engineers and academics, helped us to see and shape the story.

## What is 'the checklist effect'? Apart from the title of your film, obviously.

It's the reduction of surgical complications and mortality by around 40% in cases where hospital teams routinely and correctly use the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist. The Checklist is a single sheet of paper with 19 items, each prompting a particular pause or activity essential for safety before, during, and immediately after an operation.

40%! Revolutionary, but true - see the pilot study across eight countries, published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#). If the Checklist was a pharmaceutical drug, we'd call it a wonder and make it mandatory the world over.

It's modeled off aviation industry practice - not a 'how to' guide for surgery (as an aviation checklist won't help you fly a plane if you don't have your wings) but a structure that encourages team communication and helps to avoid error at critical moments. For instance - did we check that there's blood available? Is this the right surgical side? Did we count that everything going into the body cavity (swabs, clips, etc) also came out?

It sounds worryingly simplistic, but fundamentally it's about changing culture in the operating room, so - tricky. There's a very useful [15 minute explainer](#) by Al Jazeera's team at The Cure, filmed with Lifebox in Uganda if you want a bit more background - or a [BBC article here](#). But you might find that...

### 3 It sounds a lot like a book I read, [The Checklist Manifesto](#).

Glad you said that - it definitely should. That's the bestseller by surgeon and author [Atul Gawande](#), and it inspired our film - all about his work with the World Health Organization, leading to development of the Surgical Safety Checklist. It's brilliant! (Though you might have heard of him more recently through his work on end of life, [Being Mortal](#).)

Atul wrote a shorter article about the Checklist in [The New Yorker](#) a few years back - but why not hear directly from the man himself in The Checklist Effect? He's the founder and chair of [Lifebox Foundation](#), the international NGO which uses the Checklist, equipment and education to make surgery safer in low-resource settings, which helped produce this film.

He features in it quite a bit - even sharing his honest perspective on what life means to him - and we got the title with his blessing (after proving TCE was worth it).

### 4 How did you fund the film?

Step by step, with a relatively small amount of money and a huge amount of goodwill. None of the crew - director through to visual effects to translation - took a salary. The opportunity to tell a story that affects us all, but is so underwhelmingly recognized, was a rare and moving one - and they gave their time and skills extremely generously.

Major travel and expenses on location were funded by Lifebox Foundation - again, because this is a story they wrestle with telling on a daily basis.

#### **4 How did you fund the film? (continued)**

How do you 'show' the impact of surgery? How do you convey a crisis when it's buried in technical language? How do you make surgery a global concern when the low-resource setting narrative is trapped in cycles of poor sanitation or HIV?

Over the course of 18 months we dug out pockets of time and money from some very busy schedules and some very tight budgets, to bring the story of global surgery home - one country at a time.

#### **5 Did you get permission from the patients to show their operations and tell their stories?**

Yes. There's a reason why filming in an operating room feels a bit like filming in a church - something sacred (and legal) about the way clinicians protect their patients. It's why working through Lifebox, with their trusted partner relationships, was essential.

But patients also have the right to share their stories, and when it comes to raising awareness of the need for safer surgery worldwide, many wanted to. Permission to record both interviews and surgical procedures was confirmed at three points: at the facility where we were authorized to film; next, via a clinician in the patient's native language before the crew came into the room; and finally before the cameras began rolling. No patient interview or general filming took place without the presence of a consenting adult (in the case of children) and a local clinician.

Patients gave their name on camera, but none have been used in the film (they're all listed as 'anonymous' in the credits).

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## Did the power really go off during the c-section in Uganda, or did you fake it?

No surprise there are so many hospital entertainment dramas - operating rooms have very theatrical lighting, something not lost on our director Lauren's cinematographer instincts ('operating theatres,' as the Brits call them, indeed).

But the honest answer is the power did really go off. Without pre-planning or post-production trickery, with the patient lying open on the table and her baby not a few minutes born, the hospital power cut out and the world stood still.

Unusual to catch the moment on camera? Certainly. Unusual for it to happen? Unfortunately not. Unstable electricity is just one of the challenges that operating room teams face on a daily basis in low-resource settings, sometimes up to 20 times a day. (It's the reason why the Lifebox pulse oximeter has rechargeable batteries - you don't want your most important monitor going dark when the room does too.) You'll notice the team looks up

but they don't panic, in fact they don't really make a sound. They just wait, expertly, for the back up lighting to kick in.

You can imagine we weren't so calm.

Well, *The Checklist Effect* is a film about the state of surgery around the world - we couldn't blur our way around this one. The film does show clips of a number of operations, and yes, it's a bit messy inside our bodies; from a hip replacement to the removal of a non-malignant tumor, the process of an operation can be rough.

But this isn't a slasher flick - all of the 'gore' is life and livelihood saving. And the story of safer global surgery is so much more than the incision; close your eyes if you need to, but don't miss the chance to learn about a global issue that directly affects you, or to connect with our characters who spend much more time alive, awake, and vital on screen than they do out cold on the operating room table.





## 8 Is surgery really so dangerous?

Surgery is one of the most strange and unnatural things you can do to a body - sedate it so it feels no pain, slice and rearrange the insides, zip up, wake up, and leave only a scar behind. But more than 359 million operations take place each year worldwide: trauma repair after road traffic accidents, C-sections for obstructed labor - in so many cases, surgery is the only resort.

Incredible, really, what a complicated system we've built to save ourselves.

But it's a system that relies on equipment, training, resources, infrastructure, management, communication, teamwork - that is, things that can fail, and things that are subject to human error. An estimated 200-300 'wrong person' operations take place in the U.S. each year, and your risk of dying from anesthesia alone in the U.S./U.K. is about 1 in 250,000 - almost distant enough to fool ourselves into thinking that surgery is 'routine,' but by no means impossible. In countries where resources are scarce, the risk is shockingly apparent. In some parts of West Africa, for example, your risk of dying from anesthesia is as high as 1 in 133.

Access to appropriate technology is a critical factor. More than 70,000 hospitals in low-income countries are missing a pulse oximeter, a non-invasive machine that clips to the finger and warns of falling oxygen levels in a sedated patient. The 'pulse oximetry gap' puts more than 30 million lives at risk every year - it's the most important monitor in modern anesthesia, considering organ failure only needs a few minutes to take hold. The Checklist Effect explores this and many other factors with the scope for making a life-saving operation a life-threatening one instead.

So yes, there is a crisis of safety. And that's before you talk about access. An estimated 5 billion lack access to any kind of safe, affordable surgical service.

# CREDITS

✓ indicated they've had surgery

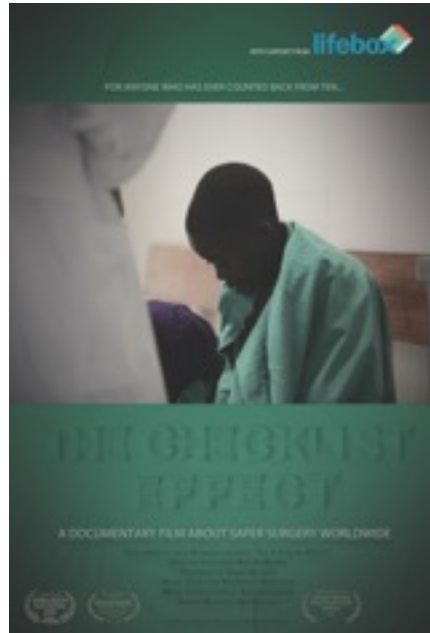
## CAST

Atul Gawande ✓  
Helmut Esteves  
ANONYMOUS ✓  
ANONYMOUS  
Manolo Ramirez Garcia  
Luis Hernandez  
Luis Martinez  
Alexi Matousek  
Rodolphe Jean-Louis  
ANONYMOUS ✓  
Gonzalo Barreiro ✓  
Mike Presutti  
Archie Naughton ✓  
Tom Bashford  
Tracey Anthony ✓  
Kelvin Smith ✓  
Julie Plumridge  
Edward Fitzgerald  
Sergiu Sandru  
Russian Baltaga ✓  
Octavian Grama ✓  
Sergiu Cobiletschi  
Gheorghe Ciobanu ✓  
Timofei Bucuci ✓  
ANONYMOUS ✓  
Sergelen Orgoi  
David Pescod ✓  
Ganbold Lundeg  
Bayalagmaa Khuvtsgaan  
Stephen Ttendo  
Lucy Lawach  
Emmanuel Ayebele ✓  
Andrew Kintu  
George Katerega ✓  
ANONYMOUS ✓  
Natsagdori Batgombo  
ANONYMOUS ✓

## CREW

Cinematographer: Lauren Anders Brown ✓  
Camera Operator: Kristopher Anderson ✓  
Haiti & Boston Camera Operator: Yahna Harris  
Drone Camera Operator: Alexi Matousek  
Ronin Camera Operator: James Sylvia ✓  
NYC Camera Operator: Matthew Mahoney ✓  
UK Camera Operator: Mihalis Monemvasiotis  
Uganda Camera Assistant: Jennifer Denike  
Atlanta Production Assistant: Gaston Dalmau  
NY Production Assistant: Damian Ganga  
Transcription: Matthew Mahoney ✓  
Haitian Creole Subtitles: Jennifer Denike  
  
Guatemala Coordinators: Sandra Flores de Izquierdo ✓  
Elina Valenzuela  
Alex Hannenbergs ✓  
Luca Koritsanszky ✓  
Guatemala Translators: Erick Izquierdo  
Gladys Izquierdo  
Irene Barillas ✓  
Cristina Morataya  
Guatemala Subtitles: Gabby Brum  
George Molina ✓  
  
Moldova Coordinator/Translator: Ruslan Baltaga  
Sergiu Sandru  
Moldova Subtitles: Diana Rusu ✓  
  
Mongolia Coordinators: David Pescod ✓  
Unurzaya Lhagvajav  
Ganbold Lundeg  
Ganbold Batchuluun  
Unurzaya Ihagvajav  
Mongolia Translator/subtitles: Natsagdori Batgombo  
  
Uganda Coordinator: Nick Boyd ✓  
Stephen Ttendo  
Sarah Hodges ✓  
Andrew Hodges ✓  
Sophia Nambi  
Isabeau Walker  
Maytinee Lilaonitkul  
Joseph Kiwanuka  
Uganda Driver & Scout Yasin Koiré  
  
Editor & Sound Recorder: Lauren Anders Brown ✓  
Sound Design & Mixing: Ari Winters  
Music Composer: Stephen Larosa  
Trailer Music Composer: Ari Winters  
Colorist: Lauren Anders Brown  
Colorist Consultant: Matthew Falconer  
Subtitles: Sarah Kessler ✓  
Visual Effects: Kristopher Anderson ✓

# POSTERS



All of the posters are available to download by clicking on them or the link bellow.

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/it9wjfbciomznll/AABd9H60q1lTaio\\_VvaHzUN9a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/it9wjfbciomznll/AABd9H60q1lTaio_VvaHzUN9a?dl=0)