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## 5 Feet Apart - Review

When I first heard there would be a movie related to Cystic Fibrosis I was excited to see how they would tell the story of 70,000+ of us who live with this illness everyday. Here I will review the movie *5 Feet Apart* from the perspective of a CF patient. As you know if you saw the movie, the movie's main characters are a boy (Will) and girl (Stella) who are living in the hospital full time. Stella is waiting for a double lung transplant while Will is in a clinical trial to combat his B. cepacia. Of course as with any Hollywood movie, the two begin to fall in love. The movie's title is from the idea they had to disregard the 6 feet apart protocol (in order to avoid cross infection and make each other even more sick), and instead use a pool cue to keep 5 feet apart and give the middle finger to their illness.

Although I am happy for the awareness that the movie brought our community and foundation, I am irritated by the way Hollywood chose to execute the story. *5 Feet Apart* is another reminder that Hollywood chooses subjects such as Cystic Fibrosis as a way to entice viewers into paying for another ticket, while doing nothing to support the community that they are profiting off of. The movie generated over \$80,000,000 in gross income, yet CF patients and researchers got not even a penny to support their daily battles with CF.

One of the main issues I have with the movie *5 Feet Apart* is how it shows a viewer a small slice of how a CF patient may be impacted by the disease. Of the 70,000+ CF patients in the world, few have lived full time in the hospital or even have access to proper health care. The movie gives an uneducated viewer no inclination that this is one version of a CF patient's life - or how fortunate these patients are to have such a great hospital and ability to receive treatment. By not acknowledging how rare or fortunate these patients are, the filmmakers are disregarding the stories of thousands with CF and do not properly educate a viewer on how CF may impact patients differently. The CF community was excited and hopeful about *5 Feet Apart* because we knew it would create awareness and educate the greater public, but if the movie only tells a small fraction of the CF population's story, is it doing the community justice?

The movie continues to glamorize Will and Stella's lives with CF by not showing how violent and disruptive the disease can be at times. For example, in scenes where Will and Stella cough, it is often a soft and controlled low volume cough that ends with them spitting lightly into a cup. This does not show a viewer how CF patients at the stage Will and Stella are at may cough uncontrollably, loudly and violently, for much of their treatment while possibly throwing up or needing to stop their treatment to get a breath of air while hacking out a glob of yellow mucus. The way in which filmmakers had these characters coughing was not realistic, maybe they did this in an attempt to not scare viewers of our reality.

Filmmakers also disregarded several aspects of life with CF that are important to understand when educating about the disease. Digestive issues that cause patients extreme discomfort or force them to spend hours on the toilet were not mentioned once, while the patient-

health care team relationship was dramatically romanticized. Life within the hospital itself was made to look luxurious, with patients having access to a pool, several hangout areas, and the ability to walk freely throughout. As any CF patient who has been hospitalized will tell you, life within the hospital is far from luxurious. The majority of the day is spent doing treatments in your room, and when you are allowed to leave you often only have the energy to do a lap or two around the floor - of course you are fully gowned and gloved then as well.

The '5 feet apart' sentiment of the movie itself is not accurate to how many CF patients live their lives. CF patients often live prioritizing their health and infection control more than anything else, to have Hollywood make a film where two patients continually disregard their own health as well as those around them is inaccurate and disrespectful to the vast majority of us who take our health seriously. CF couples do exist and we do not always make the best choices for our health, but the way in which the *5 Feet Apart* filmmakers choose to have characters forgo their wellbeing to be close to each other seems unrepresentative of how serious our illness is. Further, patients like Will and Stella who are in near critical condition would rarely have the energy or ability to be as active or careless for their health as filmmakers make them out to be.

The idea behind a movie about CF that educates viewers and gives the public a window into our world is great - but the way Hollywood chose to make this a love story about two dying teenagers does not properly represent the lives of 70,000+ people with this terminal disease. Beside this, I do not think it is possible to make a movie about CF that everyone would be happy with - so I guess we just have to say thank you for putting Cystic Fibrosis in more people's minds. If nothing else the movie made our disease's name more visible, if that can lead to one more dollar being raised for research in order to get a cure, it is worth it.