

David Foster Discussion and Response to Questions
Thursday, April 5

Good Morning and thanks for including me and “House” in the discussion.

First, I would like to add my two cents on the discussion of how medical TV shows generate episodes. My stories tend to start with some kernel, some idea that catches my interest; that I’m fascinated with and passionate about. For one episode from our first season, “DNR”, it was the idea that what would happen if House met a patient that he actually admired. He usually despises, talks down to patients. How would an attachment to a patient influence his decisions and drive his behaviors? The plot, character, and medicine of the episode grew as I played with this idea. That’s how most of our stories begin and develop. Something catches the writer’s attention—it can be a medical story, an attitude, an ethical dilemma, a character, just about anything-- then that passion drives all the twist and turns of a full episode.

The television show "House" is perhaps more medically-oriented than any other TV show dealing with medical professionals (such as the ER or Grey's Anatomy).

Do you think that your audience is therefore different from that of other shows, or do you think that you are able to reach a wide audience regardless of heavy discussion of medical issues?

We are a character driven, procedural, medical mystery. What does that mean? We are not trying to portray an area of the hospital (like the emergency department) or a group within the hospital (surgical interns). We are following one character, Dr. Greg House—one troubled character--, as he diagnoses one case each episode. We stay with that one case, through its many twists and turns, to its conclusion. In that respect, as you note, we are more medical and, interestingly, more akin to Law and Order: SVU than some of the other shows represented in this forum. Does this make our audience different? Sure, it is smarter, more discerning, more –just kidding. I don’t think our audience is all that different. 21 million people watched the first run of our last episode. I am hard pressed to describe all those people in one way. Many people watch our show for many and different reasons. Some love the stakes and jeopardy of the medical mystery. Some could care less and, as one watcher of the show said to me last week, “the meaner he is, the more I like it”. Which leads us to the next question....

What do you think the success of the show "House" is? Is it its interesting and often educational stories about health or its characters?

By far and away, our success is attributable to the unique character, House. People actually seem to enjoy inviting the misanthropic, pill popping, patient despising, self-destructive, yet totally likeable doctor into their living rooms each week.

Have you investigated the effects of your show on knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of your audience members? If so, how and what were the results?

As a show, we have not undertaken this in any formal way. Hollywood, Health and Society has done several studies looking at these questions and “House” around organ donation and other topics. Vicki, can you share the results – David Foster