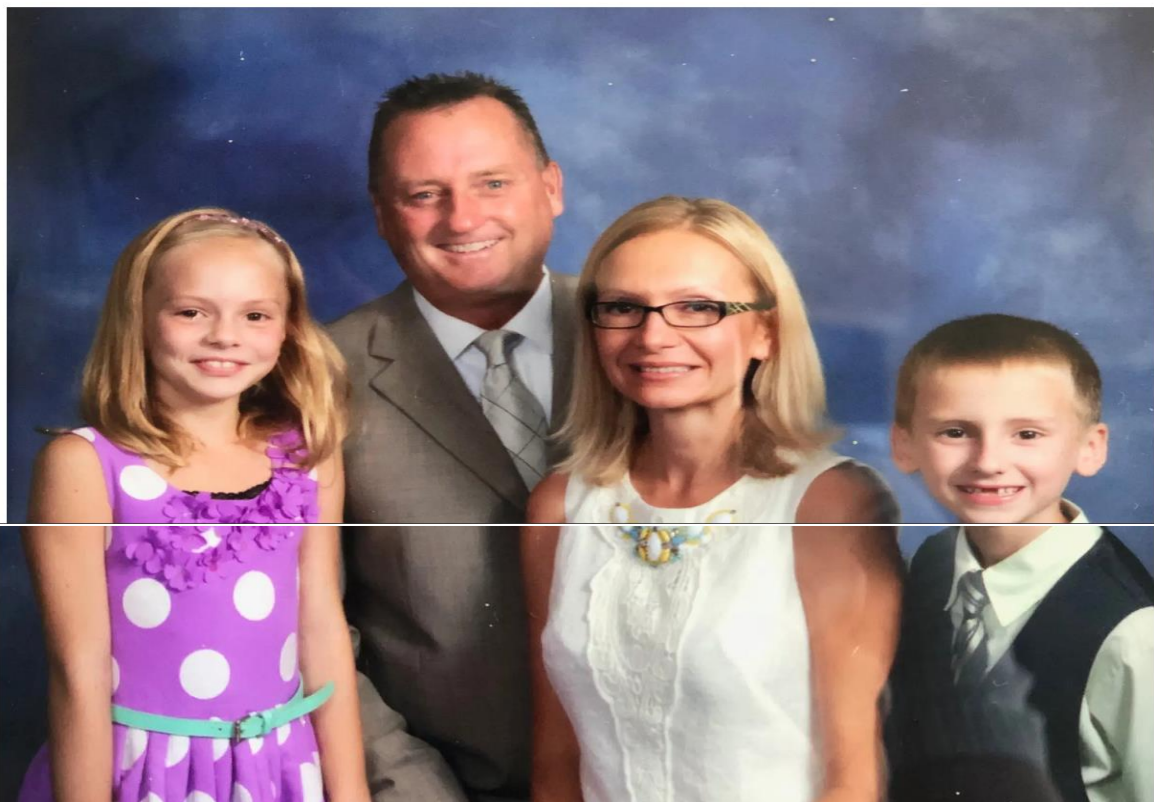


‘Take Care of Maya’ Review: A Chronicle of a Family’s Pain

In this Netflix documentary about a young girl who was held in a hospital and barred from seeing her family, we hear their side of the story.

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From left, Maya, Jack, Beata and Kyle Kowalski as seen in “Take Care of Maya,” a documentary film directed by Henry Roosevelt. Netflix

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In 2016 in St. Petersburg, Florida, Maya Kowalski was rushed to the pediatric emergency room for extreme pain. The 10-year-old would be held in the hospital for three months under a state-issued shelter order and barred from seeing her parents, whom doctors suspected of medical child abuse.

The story of the Kowalskis, which was [reported in The Cut last year](#), is at the core of “Take Care of Maya” (on Netflix), a chronicle of the events and their aftermath. At the hospital, Maya was evaluated by a child-welfare agency pediatrician who specialized in detecting child abuse and who initially diagnosed Munchausen Syndrome by proxy. The documentary unfolds mostly from the Kowalskis’ viewpoint, relying on court testimony, Maya’s father’s recollections and video, audio and written records from Maya’s mother.



To watch this film is to submit to a punishing experience. This is only partly because of its content, for, while Maya’s case involves a thorny jumble of issues — a rare pain syndrome, a controversial regimen, a dubious child welfare system — the director, Henry Roosevelt, approaches the material with an eye toward sensationalism. Every minute is charged with tension, and one senses that scenes were shaped with the intent to scandalize rather than enlighten.

What's sacrificed in this approach is rigor, the drive to exhaustively analyze the circumstances that led to the Kowalski family's troubles. For instance, the film mentions but declines to explore the relationship between Florida's hospitals and the privatized child welfare companies that serve them. "Take Care of Maya" is grueling, but it is also oddly deficient, wanting for the precision and perspective essential to deriving insight from profound trauma.

Take Care of Maya

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 43 minutes. [Watch on Netflix.](#)