

## TV Review: Sophomore Season of 'In Treatment' is Riveting, Rewarding Drama

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 3, 2009 - 1:37pm

- [Aaron Shaw](#) [2]
- [Allison Pill](#) [3]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [4]
- [Dianne Wiest](#) [5]
- [Gabriel Byrne](#) [6]
- [HBO](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Hope Davis](#) [9]
- [In Treatment](#) [10]
- [John Mahoney](#) [11]
- [Russell Hornsby](#) [12]
- [Sherri Saum](#) [13]
- [Television](#) [14]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [15]



Television Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Quick - What's the best show on television right now? "[Lost](#) [16]" has its fans but I think that show's taken a slight dip in the new season, as has the increasingly too silly "[30 Rock](#) [17]". People love "[Burn Notice](#) [18]," "[Big Love](#) [19]," and "[Damages](#) [20]," but they're done for the year. After Sunday, there is one clear answer. The best show on television is HBO's "[In Treatment](#) [10]".

HBO has adjusted the broadcast schedule for "In Treatment," combining the five sessions that were broadcast during separate nights into two evenings a week for season two. I'm still not sure of the best way to deliver a program that requires as hefty a commitment as "In Treatment," but I'm not sure this is the right solution. 90 minutes of therapy on a Monday night seems like a large hill for viewers to climb after the start of their work week.



In Treatment: Gabriel Byrne

*Photo credit: Abbot Genser/HBO*

The questionable scheduling aside, "In Treatment" features some of the best writing and acting on television that I've seen in a very long time. This is "prime of HBO" material, the kind of quality programming that I feel will eventually stand next to acclaimed hits like "The Sopranos," "Six Feet Under," and "Sex and the City". After a lull post-Tony Soprano and post-Carrie Bradshaw, "In Treatment" (with "Big Love" and "[True Blood](#) [21]") is leading the way into the new era of the most important network of the modern age.

In case you're unfamiliar (and, if you are, you can catch up with the 43 episodes of season one now on DVD), "In Treatment" features five half-hour therapy sessions a week all with the same therapist, Dr. Paul Weston (the amazing [Gabriel Byrne](#) [6], who should win an Emmy in a few months time). The first four episodes of the week feature Dr. Weston's patients and in the final episode he goes to his own doctor ([Dianne Wiest](#) [5], Emmy winner from season one and the only other returning cast member in season two despite brief appearances by Michelle Forbes as Paul's ex-wife).



In Treatment: Hope Davis, Gabriel Byrne  
Photo credit: Abbot Genser/HBO

In season two, Dr. Weston has moved from Maryland to Brooklyn and has a new group of patients, allowing for some of the best performances that you're going to see all year.

It starts on Sunday nights with the fascinating Mia ([Hope Davis](#) [9]), a former patient of Paul's who is now defending Dr. Weston in a lawsuit and also clearly needs some time on the good doctor's couch. Mia is a fascinating character, one that will almost certainly earn Ms. Davis an Emmy nomination.

A lot of characters on TV, especially in a show as charged with personalities as "In Treatment," come off as having problems that feel blown out of proportion. Mia is fascinating to me because she SO needs a lot of therapy, but she also comes off as completely believable. I feel like I know this woman. She blames everyone else for what she sees as the failures of her life and is constantly trying to get the upper hand.

In the first episode, she shows off professionally to the doctor she feels let her down and in the second one she tries to get the upper hand sexually. That second episode could be staged as a play and it would win awards. Byrne and Davis are amazing in it.

The second half of Sunday nights features another fascinating female patient named April ([Alison Pill](#) [3] of "[Milk](#) [22]"). She is a 23-year-old architecture student with a dark secret that she keeps from her family and friends. She is trying to deal with mental pain that comes with physical pain. The reveal of her issue is emotionally breathtaking and Pill is spectacular.



In Treatment: Gabriel Byrne, John Mahoney  
Photo credit: Abbot Genser/HBO

Monday nights start with family therapy with Oliver (Aaron Shaw), an 11-year-old who has two loving parents going through a bitter divorce. What's great about session three is that Oliver's parents (Russell Hornsby, Sherri Saum) are not evil people. They just disagree with how to raise their son and don't get along any more. These episodes feel a bit more forced than others but I think they just need time to reveal the

layers in this trio’s troubled lives.

The amazing John Mahoney (“Frasier”) comes to the forefront for the centerpiece of Monday nights. He plays Walter, a CEO dealing with professional scandal and personal loss and suffering panic attacks. This man has been in control of thousands of lives for years, but when lack of control, especially over his daughter’s safety, seeps into his world view, he collapses.

In the final half hour, Paul goes to see Dr. Gina Toll and deals with his own, sizable issues, often amplified by what he’s heard in the previous four sessions. The idea that therapists are not machines and that they are going to be emotionally and personally impacted by their patients is brilliantly rendered in these episodes and Byrne truly shines here. I love how different he is in his own therapy, sitting on the other side of the dynamic and allowing emotions to the surface that he can’t as a doctor.

“In Treatment” is like a great novel. It requires heavy commitment. A lot of people don’t have time for a half-hour show every week and asking for 150 minutes of original programming can be a lot. But, like a lot of therapy, it is worth the time. It is worth the effort. Byrne, Davis, Pill, Mahoney, and Wiest should all be considered for Emmys. The writing should be a slam dunk to take home awards. TV simply doesn’t get much more genuine or dramatically rewarding as “In Treatment,” this year or any other.

*‘In Treatment,’ which airs on HBO, stars Gabriel Byrne, Dianne Wiest, Hope Davis, John Mahoney, Alison Pill, and Aaron Shaw. The show was created by Rodrigo Garcia. The second season premiere airs on Sunday, April 5th, 2009 at 8PM CST.*



[23]

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