



The Truth About the Drug Companies How They Deceive Us and What to do About it

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“What does the eight-hundred-pound gorilla do? Anything it wants to.” These are the first words of Chapter One, innagurating the pages of this monumental book with metaphoric clear-seeing that is beyond deniability. Indeed, America

has made the drug companies (aka “Big Pharma”) a political and economic behemoth nearly

incapable of stopping. A staggering \$200 billion is now spent on prescription medication a year, lining the pockets of Big Pharma executives and milking an increasingly parched cash cow. In *The Truth About the Drug Companies*, Dr. Angell presents the grim details of Big Pharma’s rise to power and the manipulative and downright devious tricks it uses to stay there.

As part of a multifaceted strategy to prevent a loss of revenue, AstraZeneca (makers of Prilosec, a heartburn drug) developed an audacious plan. “The company would take out a new patent on the active form of the Prilosec molecule, name it Nexium (it wouldn’t have done to call it ‘Half-o’-Prilosec,’ but that’s what it was), and promote it as an improvement over Prilosec just in time to switch people over before the Prilosec patent expired. The plan worked.” (Page 77)

With a clarity of expression that makes the twists and turns of an otherwise confusing pharmaceutical labyrinth comprehensible, Dr. Angell lays Big Pharma’s bones bare.

She details how drugs are created not by the industry but by tax-payer supported institutions, just how *un*-innovative the industry is, and the manner in which the industry exploits the very people it is supposed to be helping. High on the top of her hit list are the “Me-Too” drugs – new versions of old drugs that are given new names, higher prices, and enough hype that they become blockbusters on the top 10 drug list.

“Once upon a time, drug companies promoted drugs to treat diseases. Now it is often the opposite. They promote diseases to fit their drugs.” (Page 86)

From the start, the reader is exposed to a disquieting and exasperating accounting of Big Pharma’s activities. Details jump off the page, and if the reader can get beyond seeing red, the facts start adding up to one giant, eight-hundred-pound gorilla’s mess: Big Pharma is swindling everyone, the government is letting it, and unless “We-the-People” rise up and do something

about it, it will only continue. An example of these pharma-atrocities?

- Most drugs are aimed at people with chronic conditions (e.g., depression, high cholesterol, arthritis), because such conditions by their nature are not so serious that they’re imminently lethal, but they don’t go away, either. There’s a lot of money to be made there. (Page 83)
- Think your doctors always do what’s best for you? They’re “educated” by Big Pharma in the latest drugs, which of course, then get prescribed most often. And just to keep things lucrative, the industry piles on the gifts: Free tickets to big games, family vacations in Hawaii, wads of cash. Where this would usually trigger red flags reading “bribery,” doctors think otherwise and continue to prescribe drugs with one hand while the other is openly waiting for the next big gift. (Page 128)
- The pharmaceutical industry has the largest lobby in Washington, by far. In 2002 it employed 675 lobbyists at a cost of over \$91 million. That’s more than one lobbyist for each member of Congress. And who are these lobbyists? Many of them are former members of Congress or congressional staff. They definitely have close ties with a government reliant on pharmaceutical dollars. (Page 198)

In an age when an overwhelming proportion of the American population is popping drugs for every conceivable sickness and discomfort,

“In my view, we have become an overmedicated society....Patients have also been well taught...that if they don’t leave the doctor’s office with a prescription, the doctor is not doing a good job. The result is that too many people end up taking drugs when there may be better ways to deal with their problems.” (Pages 169-70)

The Truth About the Drug Companies gives people even more reason to feel ill. With nearly prophetic and unapologetic verve, Dr. Angell sets the record straight: Is the pharmaceutical industry controlling government? Yes. Is it controlling medical schools and influencing doctors with incredibly biased “educational” seminars? Yes. Is it making ridiculous amounts of money by dodging research costs, milking the public, and forcing international trade laws to bend? Yes. But do we have to put up with it any longer? No. And this declaration – saved until the final chapter of the book – is like a breath of much-needed, drug-free air for a pharmaceutically-sickened audience.

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