

# Big Pharma is Killing Us

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**Medical EXPOSE**

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Drug company profits are literally killing people - and now even doctors are speaking out.

Dr. Leonard Saltz, chief of gastrointestinal oncology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, rebuked the pharmaceutical industry for the sharp rise in cancer drug prices over the last decade. The median monthly price for new cancer drugs nearly doubled between 2000 and 2014 – from a monthly cost of 4,716 dollars between 2000 and 2004 to a monthly cost of about 9,900 dollars between 2010 and 2014.

Dr. Saltz explained part of the problem: “cancer-drug prices are not related to the value of the drug. Prices are based on what has come before and what the seller believes the market will bear.”

And that’s a neat feature of our current patent system – drug companies don’t have to worry about what people can afford to pay for a product. Because monopolies set their own prices.

And that’s what a patent is – a state-backed monopoly on a product.

Thomas Jefferson knew that monopolies would be a threat to the people and the people’s government. Jefferson wrote to James Madison on December 20, 1787 expressing concern that the draft of the Constitution did not include a bill of rights “providing clearly [...] for freedom of religion, freedom of press, protection against standing armies, restriction of monopolies, the eternal and unremitting force of habeas corpus laws, and trials by jury...”

Jefferson wanted safeguards from monopolies included in our Bill of Rights – but a patent gives a company the state-sponsored monopoly on a product for the term of the patent. And patents aren’t inherently bad. It would be hugely discouraging to inventors and writers if any old troll can steal a novel idea and peddle it without crediting the inventor.

That’s why Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress the power “to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their

respective writings and discoveries.” And that’s what our Founders wanted our patents to do – encourage innovations for the public good by allowing innovators exclusive rights to their inventions or writings for a limited time.

But as corporate power has taken hold of every aspect of our government – copyright and patent law in the US has changed dramatically.

The 1790 Patent Act allowed patents to last for 7 years with a one-time renewal offered in certain cases. Now patents last for 20 years after filing, and drug companies even enjoy special extensions to make up for delays in FDA approval. And that means that drug companies don’t have to worry about competitive pricing or creating demand because the consumer can only choose between treatment - or misery and death.

So when a company develops a drug that treats a life-threatening illness – they can simply set their price: 1000 dollars per pill for Hepatitis C treatment; 10,000 dollars for a month of cancer treatment; 300,000 dollars for the year of treatment.

Can’t pay? Don’t want to pay? Maybe you’d prefer to die. It’s all the same to the companies.

Because the companies that make our medicine don’t do it for public health – they do it for profit.

Corporations like Walt Disney and Bristol Myer Squibb have lobbied to shape patent and copyright law to fill their corporate coffers instead of “promoting the progress of science and the useful arts.” As drug costs continue to climb, we’re creating a two-tiered society: those who can afford to pay to stay alive, and those who can’t.

Public health is an issue of the commons, and it’s time that we reform patent law to discourage monopolistic price-gouging on drugs that treat life-threatening illnesses. And that requires getting corporate money out of our political system so that companies can’t buy politicians who support granting patents indefinitely.

