

Report on ethical decision-making



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BUSINESS ETHICS When I used to work for a pharmaceutical company I often faced ethical conflicts which I had to engage in in an emotional and philosophical way. In the modern world, pharmaceuticals are incredibly important. How they are regulated and their safety ensured is a subject of increasingly public concern and interest and has necessitated the creation of large national institutions to do so. Also, as drug use expands, questions about the ethics of pharmaceuticals have been debated more and more in the public sphere and elsewhere. Some argue diseases are being made up and advertising is manipulative. Critics point to “ Big Pharma” manipulating research in order to increase their profit margins. These are all very important and major contemporary issues that must be addressed when we look at a topic as broad and profound as pharmaceuticals and pharmacology. Questions I asked myself included: Do pharmaceutical companies have duties and obligations to society? Is pharmacological care a right rather than a service to be sold on the market place? These are obviously very emotionally engaging questions because they involve life and death. It was very hard for me to come to a conclusion about them.

The best illustration of this ethical dilemma. is the question of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Do American drug companies have the responsibility to provide very cheap drugs to people in Africa who are infected. If the drugs were given to someone for free they might live longer—but since they don't have money they certainly will die. I wrestled with this one long and hard. This aspect of the debate really illustrates the idea of a social obligation to people above and beyond the notion of a profit margin. Critics of course will say that if drugs were given away for free there would be no money for research and so more people would die because there would be no drugs for their disease.

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This too would be a serious problem.

In the end I decided that it was right for pharmaceutical companies to advertise and sell their products for a profit. It took a lot of time and consideration for me to reach this conclusion. As of 2008, the United States is the world leader in medical research, especially in pharmaceutical development. American companies create most of the world's most innovative drugs and the FDA stamp of approval is sought by drug makers worldwide because this organization is so respected. This is an interesting point and one that may contradict in some sense the idea of Big Pharma having a social contract. The only developed country without a public health care option is also the most innovative in terms of pharmacological research. Countries that acknowledge the contract more fully by subsidizing lower prices for drugs for people do very little of the important research to develop new and successful drugs that will save people. Definitely food for thought. If drugs were given away for free, there probably wouldn't be any drugs.