

Merck and co., river blindness assignment



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Merck and Co. , River Blindness Ethical Case Analysis Lennard de Jong

Excelsior College Author Note This paper was prepared for Business Ethics,

Ethical Case Analysis, taught by Dr. Moser. Introduction and Situational

Analysis The ethical dilemma in Merck and River Blindness is whether to

pursue research that may or may result in profit, or to choose the safe option

and go for profit rather than researching the drug. The drug could possibly

lead to curing the deadly and detrimental disease known as River Blindness.

The drug would kill the parasites that cause the disease.

The qualm to this is that, the consumers of the drug could not pay for the

medication. This would result in no profit. This is the flip side of the “ orphan”

drug dilemma (Nelson, & Trevino, 2011). Merck and Co. ' s philosophy was, “

We try never to forget that medicine is for people. It is not for the profits.

The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed

to appear. The better we have remembered that, the larger they have been.

” (Nelson, ; Trevino, 2011). This is the core of their value system. Going off

this core value, Merck and Co. hould be more inclined to create the drug

despite the seeming lack of profit. Aspects that had led to the quandary are

the lack of profit and the pressure of the ethical qualm of creating a helpful

drug. “ Onchocerciasis is a parasitic disease caused by the filarial worm

Onchocerca volvulus. It is transmitted through the bites of infected blackflies

of *Simulium* species, which carry immature larval forms of the parasite from

human to human. In the human body, the larvae form nodules in the

subcutaneous tissue, where they mature to adult worms. After mating, the

female adult worm can release up to 1000 microfilariae a day.

These move through the body, and when they die they cause a variety of conditions, including blindness, skin rashes, lesions, intense itching and skin depigmentation" (" Onchocerciasis,"). Onchocerciasis is commonly referred to as River Blindness. " The only measure being taken to combat River Blindness was the spraying of infected rivers with insecticides in the hope of killing the flies. However, even this wasn't effective since the flies had built up immunity to the chemicals. " (Nelson, ; Trevino, 2011). Research can be a very costly and lengthy endeavor, costing around \$200 million and taking up to 12 years to bring to market.

Stakeholder Analysis The key stakeholders are the investors, the scientists, the consumers, and the company in general. The investors are impacted by this quandary in how the company might not recuperate the money invested and the investors might never see a profit. The company has a responsibility to ensure that the company stays profitable and that the investors see a return on their investments. The scientists are involved by the fact that they are the employees researching the drug and are therefore most involved in this. The company also has an obligation to the scientists to provide the resources needed to continue their research.

The consumers are affected by this situation in that, if the drug is researched, then they can be cured from, or even avoid getting, the disease.

The company is impacted in a way similar to the investors. The company might not ever recover the investment due to not making a profit. Analysis

Based on Ethical Theories The ethical dilemma involved in the Merck and River Blindness case, in the view of society, investing would be the acceptable option. The culture of today would deem not investing as

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unethical and morally wrong even though both choices are technically ethical.

It is legal in either decision, to invest or not to invest in the research. There is no given law saying that Merck and Co. has to invest their money in finding the cure for onchocerciasis. If the company invests, their public image would improve in leaps and bounds for making such a selfless decision. However, they might never recover from this action. While continuing research would be steps in helping the world get rid of a terrible disease, it would cause the company many monetary problems from which they could possibly never bounce back from.

The company's website states on their responsibility page that, " Because millions of people around the world depend on our products, we have high standards for how we should conduct ourselves as a company. " (" Ethics and transparency," 2010). Going off of their core value system and their philosophical statement, made by George W. Merck in 1950, investing without concern for profit, would be following in their values. Their company made a statement that profit would not be their main goal. Not investing would show that they do not place any moral obligations with their own values.

This would portray the company as only out for profit rather than a company that cares first and foremost for their consumers. By investing in the River Blindness clinical research, they would not be able to show a return of profit for their investors. Merck and Co. has a moral obligation to show revenue for the money they were given, they would not be able to fulfill such a duty. The

morally right decision would be to invest in the research, ignoring the possibility of lost profits. The scientists would receive the resources needed to continue the research which they are already morally invested in.

By not providing the money and resources needed, the scientists would be required to drop the progress that they had already made concerning drug research on Ivermectin (Mectizan), a possibly successful cure for River Blindness. The consumers would benefit by having a cure made available to them on the market for this disease. The problem was the disease was predominantly in the poorest parts of the world, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, therefore, those that needed this medicine the most, could not afford to pay for it.

The drug was already found to effectively kill a parasite found in horses that is similar to the parasite that causes River Blindness in humans. The best moral choice in this situation would be to continue with the research of the drug Ivermectin and to make it readily available and safe to those who need the drug regardless of financial capability. Conclusion and Recommendations Merck and Co. decided to make the morally correct choice and continue to invest in the research of Mectizan. They also have made it available for the people with River Blindness living in the affected countries, " Since 1987, Merck has donated more than 2. 5 billion tablets of MECTIZAN?? (Ivermectin) in more than 30 countries worldwide, helping bring a formerly common affliction in those countries closer to elimination. " (" Fighting river blindness," 2010). The Chairman of the Board, Dick Clark, stated, " When Merck made the decision more than 20 years ago to donate MECTIZAN?? to

help fight river blindness, we dreamed that a milestone like this might someday be possible. " (" Fighting river blindness," 2010). Choosing to go with this decision showed to the public that Merck and Co. are about people more than the possible loss of profits. This also shows that they will adhere to their own values and moral code of conduct and will place the public's safety ahead of corporate profits if need be. The choice to continue the research had a beneficial impact on the world. " In fact, the World Health Organization recently published results of a study proving for the first time that the elimination of river blindness with treatment of MECTIZAN?? is now possible in some endemic areas in Africa. " (" Fighting river blindness," 2010).

While accepting the responsibility of continuing research into this disease was admirable, Merck and Co. could have brought in another company or research team to aid in the investigation of this new drug. This would have possibly made it available faster to the people who need it most. This would also have helped cut the cost for Merck and Co. and would have prevented the further spread of this disease. In conclusion, Merck and Co. made the right moral and ethical decision in pursuing the research of Ivermectin.

This choice has greatly benefited the 30 countries affected by River Blindness and offers new hope to the poorest of those 30 countries. While they made the right decision, bringing in more researchers could have made progress more efficient. All in all, it was a noble and virtuous decision. It will undoubtedly enhance and increase the public's view of Merck and Co. , as well as prompt other companies to continue on with their knowledge and possibly eradicate this disease completely in later years. References Ethics

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