



## The Ethics of Big Pharma: Innovation, Profit, and Public Health in the Pharmaceutical Industry

### Article

The pharmaceutical industry plays a crucial role in public health by developing life-saving drugs that treat and prevent diseases. However, ensuring the affordability and accessibility of these drugs poses ethical challenges.

Developing a drug involves a complex and expensive process that includes research, development, clinical trials, and regulatory approvals. The cost of bringing a new drug to market can range from \$1.3 billion to \$2.8 billion, highlighting the significant investment involved. To recoup this investment and make a profit, pharmaceutical companies have a limited time before their patent exclusivity expires after 20 years, allowing other manufacturers to produce generic drugs.

However, pharmaceutical companies often use evergreening to extend their monopolies artificially, allowing them to retain exclusivity past the 20-year mark. Insulin is a prime example of heavy evergreening, with three companies dominating 90% of the global insulin market. High prices can have a significant toll on patients' financial and bodily well-being, leading to rationing and disease-related complications.

While the pharmaceutical industry deserves recognition for developing life-saving drugs, there must be a balance between innovation, profit, and public health. Ensuring access to such drugs for everyone is crucial.

Similarly, gene-editing technologies have the potential to revolutionize public health and human life. However, ethical considerations must remain at the forefront of their development to prevent the creation of a new group of people who are biologically different, leading to further inequities in the world.

The possibility of human enhancements using genome-editing technology is also being explored. However, the ethical issues of human enhancements will be tackled at a separate event to explore what changes can be made safely, which ones should be rated priorities, and which ones might be considered morally unacceptable and excluded from future exploration.

In conclusion, the pharmaceutical industry and gene-editing technologies have the potential to save lives and enhance human life. However, ensuring access to life-saving drugs and ethical considerations in gene-editing technologies is crucial. These factors must remain at the forefront of development to ensure that they serve humanity's best interests.

### Agenda



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## Pharmaceutical Industry

- The industry involved in the research, development, production, and sales of drugs for medical use
- *"The global pharmaceutical industry is expected to exceed \$1.4 trillion by 2025."*

## Patent Exclusivity

- The time period during which a patent holder has the exclusive right to manufacture and sell a particular product, process or invention without competition
- *"After the patent exclusivity period expired, several competitors entered the market, resulting in a significant decrease in drug prices."*

## Evergreening

- The practice of pharmaceutical companies extending their patent exclusivity by making minor changes to the drug, even if they do not provide any significant therapeutic benefit
- *"The company used evergreening tactics to extend their monopolies, limiting access to affordable drugs for patients."*

## Rationing

- The practice of limiting access to a particular resource or service, often due to limited availability or high cost
- *"Due to the high cost of insulin, many patients have to ration their doses, which can lead to serious complications."*

## Gene-Editing Technology

- A technique used to make precise modifications to an organism's DNA, potentially leading to treatments or cures for genetic diseases
- *"Gene-editing technology has shown promising results in treating diseases such as sickle cell anemia."*

## Sickle Cell Anemia



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- A genetic disease that affects the shape of red blood cells, leading to pain, organ damage, and other complications

- *"The use of gene-editing technology could potentially lead to a cure for sickle cell anemia."*

## Muscular Dystrophy

- A group of genetic diseases that cause progressive muscle weakness and loss of muscle mass

- *"Gene-editing technology has the potential to provide a cure for muscular dystrophy in the future."*

## Cancer

- A group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells in the body

- *"Gene-editing technology may be used in the future to target and eliminate cancer cells, potentially leading to a cure for the disease."*

## Diabetes

- A metabolic disorder characterized by high blood sugar levels, often due to the body's inability to produce or use insulin effectively

- *"Gene-editing technology may provide a cure for diabetes by modifying genes responsible for insulin production."*

## Human Enhancements

- The use of technology to improve human physical or mental abilities beyond those considered typical or normal

- *"The ethical implications of human enhancements using gene-editing technology are being explored in a separate event."*

# IGM Session

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## Discussion

1. What ethical considerations should pharmaceutical companies keep in mind when pricing their drugs? Should they prioritize public health over profit?
2. With gene-editing technologies now on the rise, what ethical considerations should be taken into account before creating a 'new group of people who are biologically different'? How can we ensure that gene-editing is used for the greater good while safeguarding against unethical practices?
3. How can we ensure the affordability and accessibility of life-saving drugs while still providing adequate returns on investment for pharmaceutical companies? What measures can be implemented to balance innovation, profit, and public health?

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