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Ecology Reading Book Club - Pharmaceutical Propaganda

During this weekly session our group discussed a chapter of *Against Health* titled Pharmaceutical Propaganda. This chapter encompassed how pharmaceutical companies finance advertisement, and essentially commercialize medications and healthcare as a whole. As a group we teased apart the impact this may have on patients, and how effective current healthcare truly is. We then dived into how culture, socioeconomic status, education, and race affect our patient's health, and the ideas and behaviors that are tied to health. As a group we brainstormed ideas to overcome health disparities the pharmaceutical industry preys upon for financial gain. An idea that resonated with our group was the idea of comprehensive healthcare. We theorized that outpatient clinics serving low socioeconomic communities could provide a broad-range of services including family medicine, occupational and physical rehabilitation, psychiatry along with other specialties. This all-encompassing approach would utilize efficacious, non-invasive treatments from all healthcare specialties, limiting the amount of prescription medications prescribed by physicians. Our overarching idea was that if we could utilize a more inclusive, conservative approach to disease our patients may have better control over their chronic diseases, minimizing emergencies and need for prescription medications

This week's chapter was truly eye-opening and at the same time disheartening. It unearthed how the pharmaceutical industry manipulates the public and physicians for financial gain. In my eyes it was an attack on the healthcare system, an entity I once held at the pinnacle of impartiality. This chapter discussed the lengths at which pharmaceutical entities will go to push their product. As a future physician knowing the different levels of bias is crucial to becoming a contemporary, patient-oriented physician. We are often taught to use evidence-based approaches to treatments, but what if the evidence was funded by a for-profit company? What if the clinical trial or journal article was written by a ghost writer or physician who is being paid to promote a specific medication? This week's chapter and subsequent group discussion may not have provided the necessary answers to these questions, but it began the discussion which is a start.

Overall, this week's text poignantly illustrated the complexity of contemporary

medicine. Our discussion of this text further propagated the necessity of utilizing a trained eye when evaluating “data”, and described the need for guidelines when treating patients. Guidelines are created by panels of healthcare providers who utilize meta-analysis of primary sources to propose a treatment regiments. Meta-analysis often incorporate findings from hundreds if not thousands of research trials in order to find the most efficacious treatment. Using this method can combat influence of individual pharmaceutical company-funded trials, especially if their findings are contradictory to numerous parallel trials. Overall, this week taught me the importance of taking the extra time to evaluate hidden agendas, and to not take single trials as hard truths. This will no doubt improve my ability to responsibly care for patients.