

SICKNESS CARTEL SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING

With revenues expected to keep climbing despite recalls and fines, will we ever be able to break Big Pharma's grip?

While the complexities of the new health care reform law may elude most, one thing seems clear: Despite increased emphasis on wellness and prevention, Americans will be making more visits to health care providers, particularly allopathic doctors, who will likely continue doing what they do best: prescribe medication.



Fortune magazine's annual ranking of America's largest corporations reveals no less than six pharmaceutical companies in the top 115 based on 2009 revenue totals: Johnson and Johnson (#33; \$61.9 billion), Pfizer (#40; \$50 billion), Abbott Laboratories (#75; \$30.7 billion), Merck (#85; \$27.4 billion), Eli Lilly (#112; \$21.8 billion), and Bristol-Myers Squibb (#114; \$21.6 billion). What's more, these figures seem destined to rise in the next several years, according to an April 2010 forecast from IMS Health: "The U.S. will remain the single largest [pharmaceutical] market, with 3-6 percent growth expected annually in the next five years and reaching

\$360-\$390 billion in 2014, up from \$300 billion in 2009."

Profits Over Patient Care

Revenue, efficacy and ethics rarely, if ever, seem to cross paths when it comes to the pharmaceutical industry, and like doctors' prescribing habits and drug revenues, there's little sign that will change anytime soon, either. Just consider the following (and make sure your patients are aware of and consider it, too):

On April 27, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that AstraZeneca (\$32.8 billion in 2009 revenue) had [agreed to pay a \\$520 million fine](#) to settle claims that it fraudulently marketed the antipsychotic drug Seroquel, promoting it to doctors and patients for off-label purposes and giving kickbacks in return. AstraZeneca denies the allegations, yet agreed to pay the whopping fine. Last October, [Pfizer Inc., was fined for similar off-label marketing practices](#), as well as illegal marketing activities including providing vacations and other perks to doctors as incentives to prescribe Pfizer products. The record \$2.3 billion

fine, included a \$1.2 billion criminal fine, the largest levied in a U.S. criminal case. There was also evidence that Pfizer continued its illegal tactics even while negotiating the settlement.

In January, McNeil Consumer Health Care Products (a division of Johnson and Johnson) issued a massive recall of over-the-counter drugs including Motrin, Tylenol and Benadryl [because of a moldy, musty or mildew-like odor](#) that had made some patients sick. In April, McNeil announced a second recall, this one specific to infant/child fever reducers and allergy medications. [According to an April 30 press release by the company](#), "Some of the products included in the recall may contain a higher concentration of active ingredient than is specified; others may contain inactive ingredients that may not meet internal testing requirements; and others may contain tiny particles. While the potential for serious medical events is remote, the company advises consumers who have purchased these recalled products to discontinue use."