

Pharma must be held more accountable to its human rights responsibilities

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In this week's *PLoS Medicine*, the Editors argue that drug companies should be held much more accountable for their human rights responsibilities to make medicines available and accessible to those in need.

Despite decades of advocacy on the part of the access to medicines movement, and [human rights](#) guidelines developed in 2008 for pharmaceutical companies that make clear that their responsibilities go beyond stakeholder value to encompass human rights, there is inadequate accountability, say the Editors.

"At the same time that the 825 billion dollar global pharmaceutical industry operates as society's chief developer and purveyor of life-saving medicine, two billion people around the world lack access to essential medicines. Such a persistent perversity demands more outrage," argue the Editors.

The editorial accompanies a series of viewpoints in a commissioned [PLoS Medicine](#) Debate on the topic of whether drug companies are living up to their human rights responsibilities. In the Debate, three unique perspectives are offered: Sofia Gruskin and Zyde Raad from the Harvard School of Public Health say more assessment is needed of human rights responsibilities; Geralyn Ritter, Vice President of Global Public Policy and Corporate Responsibility at Merck & Co. argues that multiple stakeholders could do more to help States deliver the right to health; and Paul Hunt and Rajat Khosla introduce Mr. Hunt's work as the

UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health (2002-2008), regarding the human rights responsibilities of pharmaceutical companies and access to medicines.

"The importance and significance of accountability in this area cannot be overstated," say the Editors. "Beyond an add-on or peripheral activity, the acknowledgement and promotion of human rights must become a regular, integrated aspect of the work of pharmaceutical companies. Better yet would also be an external, international body charged explicitly with monitoring the policies and practices of [pharmaceutical companies](#) and reporting publicly on the discharge of their right-to-health responsibilities."

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