Taking on the Lethal but Legal Industries: Strategies to Change Corporate Practices that Harm Health

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The Problem

Corporate business and political practices have become a major determinant of global patterns of premature death and preventable illnesses.

Primary causes of NCDS:
Tobacco, unhealthy diets, alcohol and inactivity

Motor Vehicles

Although low- and middle-income countries have only half of the world’s vehicles, they have 90% of the world’s road traffic deaths.
Countries with the highest levels of lethal violence:

50% committed with a firearm

Countries with the lowest levels of lethal violence:

12% committed with a firearm
## Problems with Drug Product Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product design</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inadequate premarket testing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drugs with common or dangerous side effects are released to market. Example: Thalidomide, rofecoxib(Light et al, 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inadequate post-marketing surveillance</strong></td>
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<td>After release, inadequate surveillance fails to detect serious side effects before they harm health. Examples: Cerivastatin, rofecoxib(Dyer, 2016)</td>
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<td><strong>Production of sub-standard drugs</strong></td>
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<td>Inadequate quality control or fraudulent practices lead to production of drugs that are unsafe or ineffective. Examples: dispensing of antimalarials and antibiotics with less than minimum of active pharmacological ingredients(Nayar et al., 2015)</td>
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</table>

Merck-funded study discovered after 30-60 days taking Vioxx, patients were 37% more likely to have suffered from a heart attack.
### Annual Global Deaths Attributable to Products and Practices of Selected Consumer Industries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>Heart disease, lung and other cancers, respiratory diseases</td>
<td>6,297,287 (includes exposure to second-hand smoke)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and beverages</td>
<td>Obesity, diabetes, heart disease, some cancers</td>
<td>3,371,232 (attributed to high Body Mass Index)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Accidents, homicides, liver cancer, cirrhosis</td>
<td>4,860,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicles</td>
<td>Injuries, respiratory diseases including cancer, heart disease</td>
<td>1,300,000 (from collision injuries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,223,540 (from particulate matter air pollution, of which motor vehicles are largest contributor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>Homicide, suicide, unintended injuries</td>
<td>500,000, of which 300,000 are conflict-related and 200,000 homicides, suicides and accidents (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>Over and under medication</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Lancet review, 2013
Key Public Health Challenges in Netherlands

Cancer incidence 305/100,000 above OECD average of 270

11.1% adults obese

17% daily smokers

Alcohol consumption 9.1 liters per year

Ischemic heart disease mortality has decline but further improvements are possible

Full implementation of WHO Best Buys in tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food could bring about further reductions but require overcoming industry opposition
## Corporate Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business practices</th>
<th>Political practices</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product design</td>
<td>Lobbying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Campaign contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail distribution</td>
<td>Public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing</td>
<td>Trade pacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>Sponsored scientific research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bottom line: Corporate practices are a major, modifiable determinant of health.
The rise of the corporate consumption complex

The network of consumer corporations, financial institutions, advertising agencies, law firms, lobbying groups and the politicians, scientists and others they support.
But.....

By ourselves, public health professionals, researchers and advocates don’t have the power, resources or skills to successfully take on the growing role of transnational corporations as social determinants of health.
If you can’t fix a problem, make it bigger.

Donald Rumsfeld
Corporate business and political practices contribute to:

- Global burden of disease and health inequities
- Growing threats to democracy
- Rising income inequality
- Worsening climate change
Corporate campaign contributions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Spent</th>
<th>Number of Lobbyists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$3,362,775,110</td>
<td>11,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$3,154,250,328</td>
<td>11,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$3,222,905,609</td>
<td>11,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$3,256,587,397</td>
<td>11,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>$3,237,101,585</td>
<td>12,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$3,300,587,325</td>
<td>12,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$3,321,284,305</td>
<td>12,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$3,511,161,296</td>
<td>12,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$3,501,843,771</td>
<td>13,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$3,310,442,501</td>
<td>14,140</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

30,000 European Union lobbyists in Brussels, nearly matching the 31,000 staff employed by the European commission.  

Corporate Europe Observatory
Top 1% Share of Total U.S. Income, 1913-2015

Income Inequality
What do these eight men have in common with the poorest half of the world’s population?
IF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES WERE TAXED FAIRLY, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES COULD RAISE AN EXTRA $242BN* TO TACKLE INEQUALITY

OXFAM

Figure 1: The Share of Tax Havens in US Corporate Profits

*Source: ActionAid USD 13bn and Oxfam USD 104bn.
Carbon emissions
We live in a Company World
How Company World Shapes our Lives and our Health

- Structures choices on lifestyle and consumption
- Sculpt built and natural environments
- Manipulates democracy and governance
- Alters our consciousness and grabs our attention
- Molds our ideas and ideologies
- Constructs access to and quality of health care
How do we escape from Company World?

Strategies for fixing bigger problems?
Five Goals for Reducing Harm from Company World

1. Remove corporations from public health and trade policy decisions
2. Protect science from corporate manipulation and conflicts of interest
3. Revitalize public sector
4. Protect democracy from corporate interference
5. Challenge view that no other world is possible
Remove corporations from public health policy decisions

Article 5. 3. FCTC: In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law.

Other actions:

• Shut revolving door between government and corporations
• Limit industry participation in European Commission and other advisory groups
• Limit industry involvement in WHO
• Require decisions of public agencies to partner with corporations to be based on evidence
• Limit industry funding for regulation or public education
Conflicts of interest occur when the public roles of organizations or individuals conflict with their private roles.

When an organization must choose between pursuing its public versus its private (business) interests, a conflict of interest exists.
Members of civilized societies are expected to:

- Not deliberately harm others,
- Not knowingly promote false information
- Not undermine or subvert publicly approved goals

Corporations are expected to:

- Maximize profits
- Increase market share
- Amplify return on investment
- Reduce any political threat to profitability or stability
Three Types of Conflicts of Interest

Scientific

Policy

Ideological
Policy Conflicts of Interest

Paying professional organizations to advance their interest in the policy process without disclosing payment

Creating and paying citizen groups that claim to be citizen groups to advance corporate policy proposals

Arranging to meet secretly with policy makers to advance their policy proposals

Using illegal or unethical methods to obtain inside knowledge of their opponents’ positions and strategies so as to counteract or thwart them

Discrediting motives or personal behavior of the opponents of their policy proposals

Claiming that the benefits of challenged corporate practices outweigh any costs alleged by opponents

What public policies will reduce these conflicts?
Big Pharma says competition will reduce innovation and lower quality of drugs. Their real concern is lower profits.
Revitalize public sector

In food, pharma, and transport, public sector can:

Use procurement to influence markets

Create alternatives that favor public goals

Compete with private sector

Encourage democratic decision-making
Protect democracy from corporate interference

**WHAT:**
- Campaign finance reform
- Restrictions on lobbying
- Whistle blower protection
- Privacy protections
- Voter and voting protection
- Enforce regulation
- Prosecute corporate crime

**HOW:**
- Investigative journalism
- Litigation
- Mass mobilization
- Legislation
Challenge the view that no other world is possible

Contest corporate ideology on many fronts

Shout out and celebrate success stories

Learn from history

Bring new voices into politics and policy

Create new popular media

Parkland student activists against gun violence
Some Lessons for Escaping Company World

• Reframe issues from individual choice and responsibility to protecting communities, families and children
• Think and act at individual, local, national, global and planetary levels
• Bring evidence, emotions and stories into public and policy arenas
• Build links among campaigns for equity, democracy, health, social justice and a sustainable world
• Promote and support leaders of excluded voices
• Find sustainable balance between urgency and patience
• Challenge the view that no other world is possible than Company World
For more information:
Nick.Freudenberg@sph.cuny.edu

www.corporationsandhealth.org

Lethal but Legal: Corporations, Consumption and Protecting Public Health (Oxford University Press, Paperback, 2016)