

**Patent Distortions:
Do Patents Promote Pharmaceutical Innovation?**

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I would like to question whether patents do in fact promote innovation in the pharmaceutical arena. In an era where patents are increasingly questioned, one area that has remained relatively sacrosanct is the pharmaceutical arena. Many commentators, including legal scholars, commonly suggest that patents “work” in the pharmaceutical arena in promoting innovation. However, I would like to suggest that although pharmaceutical companies clearly rely on patents for their profits, patents create distortions in the path of innovation and may be a far from optimal incentive for the most socially beneficial outcomes. Some people already recognize that patents tend to promote more profitable drug discoveries, rather than those that may serve the majority of the world population. Nonetheless, I find it curious and worth exploring why people tend to assume that patents “work” to promote pharmaceutical innovation outside of a limited group of individuals that focus primarily on access to medicine. In light of the popular cry for patent reform, I would like to turn a more critical lens in this area that attempts to not only look at whether certain facts are true, but also consider how elements of social science may serve to perpetuate distortions about the innovation derived from patents. In particular, I think that many people may be subject to a “schema” that assumes that patents promote drug innovation, which results in perpetuation of this schema according to social science principles. This is currently a very early stage (and non-empirical) project.