

Don't put bottom line above cure

IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT CONNOTES Canadianness—aside from hockey and igloos—it's universal medicare. The general assumption is that, despite its shortcomings of long wait times and suspect levels of care, access to health service is a right. But with a new study into a drug with anti-cancer properties, the private economy may become a barrier to further research. This would in turn halt the development of a drug that may very well save lives.

According to a study released in the journal *Cancer Cell*, University of Alberta scientists may have found a drug that effectively immobilizes brain, breast and lung cancer cells. The drug is already used in other treatments, it's simple to make and it's readily available. As a result, pharmaceutical companies have so far been uninterested in funding further study, as its economic prospects are limited.

In the end, we can't realistically expect "Big Pharma" to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into a project from which they'll likely see no return. It's not that they're opposed to curing cancer—it's just that as a business the bottom line is still paramount. But given this fact, it's absolute inappropriate to rely on private corporations to fund this kind of disease research, especially when it has a direct effect on the public good. It leaves the project open to the ebb and flow of the free market and the whim of private interests.

We've seen this play out already on a much larger scale with Brazil's decade-long program that provides free antiretroviral drugs to citizens infected with HIV/AIDS. In the early '90s, around 20 per cent of adult Brazilians were infected; that number now hovers around 0.6 per cent. But because those infected are becoming immune to the older generic drugs, it's becoming necessary for the Brazilian government to purchase antiretrovirals that are still under patent. This could cripple the free-drug program, as patented drugs can cost around US \$17 000 per person per year—as opposed to several hundred dollars for generic medication. Moreover, if Brazil does decide to produce generic versions of US-patented drugs, they could face economic sanctions.

It's a lose-lose scenario common in many other countries, reinforced by a policy that some companies engage in called "evergreening." With this system, they make small changes to drug formulas or dosage methods, effectively allowing them to renew expiring patents in perpetuity. But these companies argue that it's necessary to keep prices high outside of Africa in order to fund the reduced prices offered to some African countries that are hardest hit by the pandemic.

These are the harsh economic realities of AIDS/HIV medication and research. That is, for corporations to sustain production and development, a certain amount of profit must be made. We're seeing this unfold in India, where the country's leading pharmaceutical companies have begun abiding by global patent agreements and are poised to start producing drugs for the American market. The industry, potentially worth US \$3 billion per year, could provide a huge injection into India's economy, while at the same time removing the world's primary source for low-cost generic drugs.

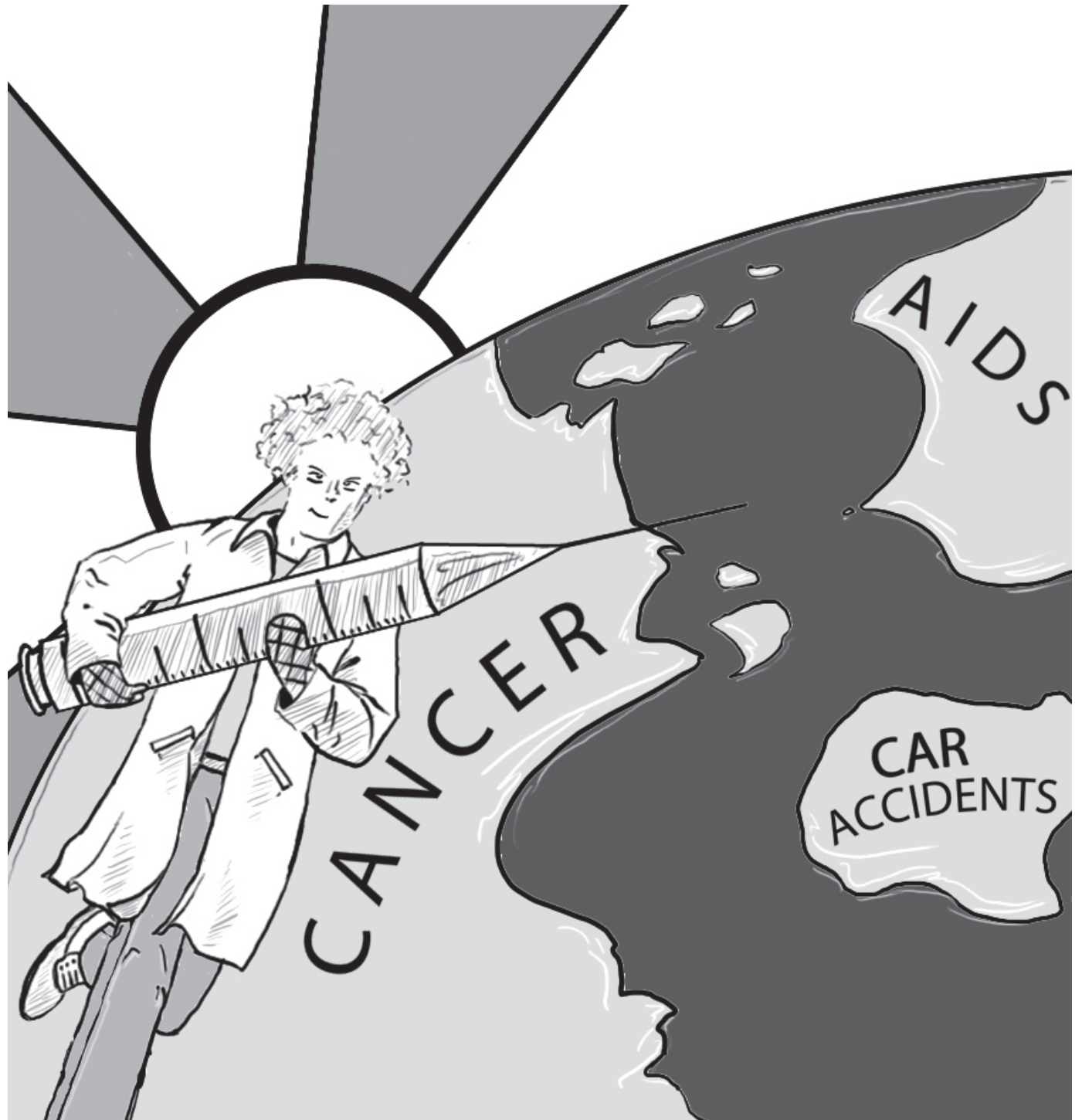
This is why it's integral that prosperous governments increase funding to make treatments readily available to all regardless of their status. We must also relax patent laws while in turn assuring that research isn't susceptible to the fluctuating budgets of big pharmaceutical companies. It's a hefty goal, to be sure, but not impossible—especially when you consider that the US government spends US \$8 billion a month in Iraq. And with all that cash put towards big, sexy bombs, it would be a shame if the U of A's potential cancer cure went bottom-up over a lack of funding.

MATT FREHNER
Editor-in-Chief

Oy vey, Moshe!

Rape is a bad thing.
I should not have to say why.
Tell Moshe Katsav.

ADAM ROZENHART
Poet Emeritus



MATTHEW BARRETT

LETTERS

'Killer' Coke fires back with the facts

Recently, students at the University of Alberta have expressed some interest in The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC)'s operations in Colombia and India (re: "Coke contract raises ethical concerns for SU," 11 January).

The University of Alberta's partnership is with the local Canadian bottler (Coca-Cola Bottling Company) whose business activities are limited to the Canadian market; however, I would like to provide you with an update on what TCCC is doing to address students' concerns.

In Colombia, TCCC continues to take steps to strengthen its business practices and commitment to labour rights. Working closely with international and community-based groups, TCCC ensures workers rights are protected and free from violence or interference. It also supports programs that aid children, promote education and bring relief to victims of the country's ongoing conflict.

Last year, the International Labour Organization (ILO) accepted requests made independently by TCCC and the International Union Federation (IUF) to conduct an independent and impartial evaluation of the labour relations and workers' rights practices of Coca-Cola bottlers in Colombia.

TCCC welcomes this independent third-party review and I will be sure to keep you apprised of the results.

TCCC is strongly committed to environmental stewardship and in India Coca-Cola has been recognized for its environmental practices and programs by the Indian Red Cross and World Environmental Foundation.

In December, India's Union Minister of Water Resources concluded that agricultural pumping, not industry activities, was the major contributor to the depletion of ground water.

I thank you for the opportunity to share this with you and direct you to www.cokefacts.org for information on our activities around the world.

DAVID MORAN
Director
Public Affairs and Communications
Coca-Cola Ltd

Letters to the editor should be dropped off at room 3-04 of the Students' Union Building, or e-mailed to letters@gateway.ualberta.ca.

The Gateway reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to refuse publication of any letter it deems racist, sexist, libellous or otherwise hateful in nature. The Gateway also reserves the right to publish letters online.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than 350 words, and should include the author's name, program, year of study and student identification number to be considered for publication.

LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Fifteen years later, Loughheed haunts the SU again

Liberals and members of the other parties are becoming increasingly conscious of the "clandestine" activity of certain card-carrying Conservatives involved in student government.

It is becoming rather apparent that members of the immediate Students' Union Executive have used their positions to ensure that positions of authority and influence in SUB particularly are filled with PC supporters or members.

It has been brought to our attention that Mr Loughheed, leader of the provincial Conservatives, has been selected as a keynote speaker in SUB. Could Mr McKenzie's chairmanship of the SUB opening committee be a factor in Mr Loughheed's selection?

Mr McKenzie has seen fit to make neat little comments about the new SUB in the Gateway recently, wherein he finds it difficult not to mention Conservatism or the Conservative party (but then, he is a card-carrying member).

Mr King, vice-president of the Students' Union, has been quoted as saying in the Gateway that

the PC party is the strongest on campus (which every party on campus would dispute on a basis of their showing in the 1966-67 Model Parliament), when no such statement was called for.

As vice-president of the Students' Union, we feel that he should concern himself solely with this position. He was not elected to espouse his views on the Progressive Conservative party on campus. We feel that this is both unnecessary and unfortunate.

Students' Union elections have not been permeated with politics in the past; neither should student government. Two members (president and secretary) of last year's executive were card-carrying members of the Liberal Party and neither maintained a partisan role during the year.

The Conservatives could not control the government in last year's Model Parliament—we should not allow them to infiltrate and run student government this year.

W R FOWLE
President
Campus Liberals
12 October, 1967

From the Archives is a semi-regular feature where the Gateway runs historical letters that we feel are of particular importance—or are just really hilarious. In this case, we've cleverly tied it in with last week's Letter as well.