

From the Editor's Desk

The pharmaceutical industry in India has a long and complex history. For the most part, while it has been regarded as an industry, it has been under the scrutiny of the health sector and its purveyors where its products are exclusively sold. This tension, between treating it as an industry to be nurtured, as an economic entity and as a producer of essential life saving good, has often put a bind on people oriented policy making for the sector.

An important actor in this scenario is the medical profession. It acts, or at least is commissioned by its professional mandate to act, in the interest of the patient and the welfare of people. On the other hand, it also takes on the role of promoter of medicines and becomes itself in a sense the first consumer of the products of the industry.

This makes for a complex of networks, pathways and ties among industry, the government, the consumer and the medical profession and health sector. It also determines the nature of policy especially mediated by interest groups which are made up largely of consumers and sections of health sector and government. Unravelling this web of relationships is not only a fascinating exercise but also brings into the foreground the nuances of drug manufacture, its monitoring and dimensions of the market which are not easily revealed otherwise.

This collection of papers has emerged from a research study 'Tracing Pharmaceuticals in South Asia', a collaborative project of the University of Edinburgh and the Centre for Health and Social Justice. Presented at a dissemination workshop in New Delhi, these papers provide a glimpse of a fascinating exploration that encompasses the day-to-day journey of pharmaceutical products viewed through an anthropological lens within a framework of pro-people policy making. We are grateful to Roger Jeffery and Abhijit Sen for making this issue possible, and to all the authors.

Also in this issue is an exploration of the demographic database on morbidity by Soumitra Ghosh and Arokiaswamy in the section 'Exploring Demography', in which we hope to showcase research on demographic databases.

We are happy to announce a new website for this journal: www.jhs.co.in. We invite you to explore the 'Knowledge Community on Health Studies' and use the space to initiate discussion on topical issues---both those emerging from the articles in the issue and outside.