

This is the story of one of the great unspoken scandals of our times. Today, the people across the world who most need life-saving medicine are being prevented from producing it. Here's the latest example: factories across the poor world are desperate to start producing their own cheaper Tamiflu to protect their populations – but they are being sternly told not to. Why? So rich drug companies can protect their patents – and profits. There is an alternative to this sick system, but we are choosing to ignore it.

Our governments have chosen, over decades, to allow a strange system for developing medicines to build up. Most of the work carried out by scientists to bring a drug to your local pharmacist – and into your lungs, or stomach, or bowels – is done in government-funded university labs, paid for by your taxes.

Drug companies usually come in late in the process of development, and pay for part of the expensive, but largely uncreative final stages, like buying some of the chemicals and trials that are needed. In return, then they own the exclusive rights to manufacture and profit from the resulting medicine for years. Nobody else can make it.

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