Abstract

This thesis is concerned with assessing the involvement of the pharmaceutical industry with the United States’ health system. We will consider the role that the industry plays in the greater system, and how its activities influence the environment around it. This is done through a case study, in the context of the United States experiencing a so-called “opioid epidemic.” This crisis is a serious problem for the health system, and society as a whole, which predominantly involves prescription pharmaceuticals. We will undertake an examination of the pharmaceutical industry’s relationship with that crisis through a strong reliance on critical discourse analysis, rooted in systems theory.

Despite being a critical component in the American health system, and the one directly responsible for the creation of pharmaceuticals, we will see that the industry is predominantly treated as an ally in addressing the opioid epidemic, rather than complicit in its emergence. This indicates that the industry successfully influences the discourse surrounding its role and responsibilities as a component of the health system.

Keywords

Pharmaceutical industry, lobbying, healthcare, PhRMA, health system, opioid, prescription drugs