



Patents and Public Health: Two Essays on Medicine & Genetics as Intellectual Property (Educational Series) (Volume 1)

Matthew Howard

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Now is an important time in human history. Viral outbreaks threaten lives and make headlines. We see new diseases appear and spread across the planet. We map our genetic code. And we now share the planet with lifeforms of our own creation.

A global communication system keeps us informed. But a global system of trade agreements plays a very important role we do not hear so much about. These trade agreements govern, among other things, patent protection for intellectual property.

When a nation accepts a trade agreement treating medicines as intellectual property, it can find itself ill-equipped to confront public health crises like outbreaks of viruses and disease. Genetic material, too, can become protected intellectual property, although the courts of different nations disagree on just what material and how protected it might be. Once the subject of futuristic science fiction novels, the commodification and ownership of human genetic material has become our reality in the 21st century.

The two essays in this booklet address the ethical concerns as well as the practical, administrative realities for the offices and courts where governments make decisions that affect all of us; our health, our genetic code, and our future.

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