A Tale of Three Diseases: Why Big Pharma needs Anthropologists

Big Pharma casts a controversial spectre in the global biomedical economy. It is not a sphere in which cultural anthropologists are most at home. So, why should Anthropologists consider embracing this sphere? We have the powerful skill of being able to listen to stories, discern social patterns, and then re-tell stories in a way that can make them better understood to a wider audience. Beyond the Academe it is one of our most powerful tools. When story telling is used within a context of disease and illness, it has the power to transform the ways in which a medical establishment understands and treats the humans who suffer from disease, and therefore has a profound opportunity to optimize human outcomes. This talk will illustrate how the power of cultural narrative is being used in Pharma companies’ market research to optimize how physicians and patients experience disease and its treatment. This, in turn, will demonstrate how unearthing the ways in which cultural truths are embedded into biomedical discourses can become a fascinating and rewarding work space for Anthropologists.