

In “Drugs Into Bodies,” Steven Epstein recounts a specific moment in the history of AIDS activism and the changing relationship between researchers and the researched. This moment exists as part of a broader discussion of biomedical ethics and the potential roles of patients as objects/co-creators/owners of knowledge. Epstein also covers the role of activists and activist organizations in the transformation of the treatment of patients with AIDS and HIV in the late 1980s. While not a focus, Epstein joins other scholars discussing the ways that laypersons turned scientific-knowledge-holders can impact science policy and join scientific conversations.

Epstein sets up a key issue his research early by illustrating the “clash between the ‘scientific method’ and ‘the real world’” (p. 210) in the development of vaccines to prevent the contraction of HIV: you can only test a vaccine when patients continue to engage in high-risk behavior, but you’re ethically obligated to counsel patients on prevention techniques when they join the trial. He reinforces this by sharing how patients in trials were experiencing their participation - they were frustrated that access to other necessary drugs was limited, they were livid upon discovering that they were in the “placebo” group.

He further describes the inexperience of all involved: physicians were unfamiliar with the restrictions of the trials, sometimes leading to them helping patients obtain banned drugs; infectious disease researchers weren’t used to interacting with patients or working in cooperative groups, resulting in trouble with shared work and trial protocols; FDA officials were unaccustomed to the activist network that was created to support AIDS/HIV patients which made them unprepared for nearly everything; and certainly, patients were unaccustomed to being both patients and research subjects (p. 215), leading to their double agent status causing problems in both arenas.

Epstein takes on a substantial amount of activity in this chapter, and provides a solid overview of the parties involved in this moment. The chapter poses more questions than it answers and continues to point to conflicts “between reformist and revolutionary critiques of scientific practice” (p. 234). These conflicts persist (and will continue to do so) as long as scientific practice exists. I would like to see links to other community-initiated challenges to scientific practice that resulted in substantive changes and a description of effective strategies. Certainly, many of ACT UP’s methods are being used today in other new social movements (p. 220), and their legacy of activism is alive.

Epstein, S. (1996). *Drugs Into Bodies*. In *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (pp. 208–234). University of California Press.

Highleyman, L. (n.d.). The Bay Area Reporter Online | 25 years later, activists recall ACT UP’s legacy. Retrieved August 31, 2017, from <http://ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=67538>