

A deadly lack of geopolitical flows

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Anna Johnson - Nearly [70% of adults](#) in the United States rely on prescription drugs to treat their medical conditions. For many, those medications are the difference between a productive, healthy life or chronic illness and death. Close to 40,000 Americans have [cystic fibrosis](#), a condition that can cause respiratory infections, breathing problems, and lung disease. While chronic and incurable, in the United States, it is possible to treat cystic fibrosis. But [for many people in countries outside the United States and Europe](#), a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis means an early death.

The problem with treating cystic fibrosis is not a lack of knowledge, it's a disruption in the [flow](#) of goods across boundaries between wealthy and poor countries. Part of the problem of getting life-saving drugs to people in developing states is merely logistical. Some, like vaccines, require refrigerated transportation and storage. The cost of transport alone is a barrier to access to medication even before the addition of the drug's cost. In this case, though, the restriction of the flow of cystic fibrosis medication is a specific, intentional choice of one company - Vertex Pharmaceuticals. Their drug, Trikafta, is widely used in the United States despite its over \$300,000 annual price tag. Vertex has a monopoly on cystic fibrosis medications and they want to protect that monopoly by limiting the flow of manufacturing rights and obstructing people's attempts to get ahold of their drugs in non-Western countries.

This week, a group of cystic fibrosis patients from India, Ukraine, South Africa and Brazil is taking legal action in an attempt to force Vertex to allow the drug to be produced and shipped outside the U.S. and Europe, possibly in a generic form. There is one country already undermining Vertex's restrictions on the flow of prescription drugs - Argentina.

Argentina is not a part of the global treaty on patent protection, thus they do not recognize Vertex's intellectual property rights for Trikafta. The decision not to join the treaty on patent protection is a part of Argentina's geopolitical code which determines how they interact with other geopolitical actors. While initially, that decision caused disputes between Argentina and patent holders, now it has given the state a powerful position from which to negotiate the sale and distribution of their version of the drug. This an example of how restricting a flow through an economic network has benefits for the citizens of a country.

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