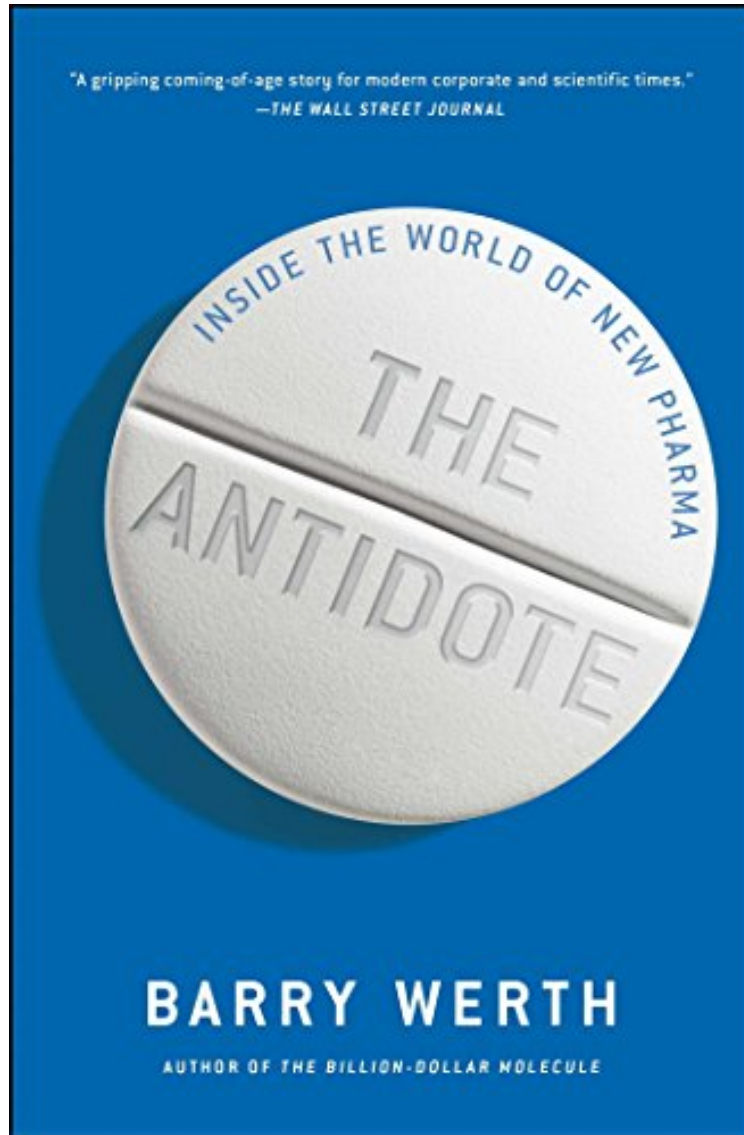


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The Antidote: Inside the World of New Pharma

Barry Werth

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Barry Werth : The Antidote: Inside the World of New Pharma before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Antidote: Inside the World of New Pharma:

38 of 39 people found the following review helpful. The tribulations and triumph of drug developmentBy Ashutosh S. JogalekarAs a biomedical scientist I really enjoyed this book. It is the sequel to the author's previous volume "The Billion Dollar Molecule". Both books provide a fly-on-the-wall account of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, an innovative biopharmaceutical company that brought two breakthrough medicines - one for hepatitis C and the other for cystic fibrosis - to market two years ago. Both these drugs were the first of their kind and have given thousands of patients a

new lease on life. From a broader perspective however, the author's goal is to shed light both on the immensely challenging process of bringing a new drug to market and the brilliant scientists and driven personalities that make it possible. Werth's account of Vertex focuses mainly on the hepatitis C drug, with the cystic fibrosis drug playing a smaller but still important role. The previous book was much more science-heavy than this one, emphasizing the chemistry, biology and computer science that goes into the early stages of drug discovery. In spite of the intense scientific competition and research depicted in that volume (much of it spanning the late 80s and early 90s), Vertex did not bring a successful drug to market until 2010, underscoring the challenge of drug discovery in which you have to furiously paddle simply to stay afloat. The two books thus mirror two different phases of the company: the first dealing mainly with the science and the birthing pains of a new startup, and the second dealing with the transformation of the startup into a commercial enterprise. You will thus find much more of the business, legal and commercial aspects of drug development in this volume. Boardroom deliberations and the subtleties of drug pricing litter the narrative. Both books, however, provide an excellent overview of the multiple challenging stages of drug discovery, from discovering an initial "hit", to optimizing its properties to formulating it and finally selling it in the form a once-a-day pill. The account of formulation difficulties was especially revealing to me. As the founder of Vertex put it, taking a drug all the way from initial discovery to the market is harder than putting a man on the moon, partly because the biology is so complex and incompletely understood. Werth has always been a skilled purveyor of the personalities and egos that populate the highest echelons of the science and business and he continues this tradition in this book. Along with highly driven scientists we meet egotistic but talented lawyers, executives, government officials, Wall Street analysts and venture capitalists. The founder of Vertex is described as having a "reality distortion field" akin to Steve Jobs. The character descriptions are far more colorful in the previous book but this volume does have its share of sharp profiles: for instance one management consultant "dressed like George Will but sounded like Don Draper channeling Alan Ginsburg". One of the strengths of the previous volume was that many of the personalities portrayed in it - including academic giants like Robert Burns Woodward and industrial giants like George Merck - were fundamentally more interesting but the present account on the other hand does a better job of describing the vast and sundry set of individuals required to sustain the diverse drug enterprise. We also see how cruel the business can be, bringing failure to years of intense effort and laying off dedicated scientists who have given their heart and soul to the process. Werth's discussion of the two Vertex drugs also raises important questions about the future of the industry. The hepatitis drug is targeted toward a vast patient population, much of which is located in poor countries. The cystic fibrosis drug is targeted toward a small patient population, much of which is located in rich countries. The stories of patients in both groups - one of which Werth documents in detail - are heartbreaking, but in both cases the challenge is to balance profits with cures. In one case the company was compelled to charge exorbitant amounts of money because of the small patient population while in the other case the lack of wealthy patients led to lower revenues. Whether you are developing a drug for millions or for thousands, the RD costs are roughly the same - and enormous. This is the moral and financial challenge the industry faces right now; how, when it is trying to develop highly personalized therapies for smaller and smaller patient groups, can it get away with both charging reasonable prices and recovering the expenditure on RD that it can plug into developing the next drug. Werth deftly discusses these issues along with the underlying ones of FDA approvals and Medicare and government controls. Ironically, the successful Vertex story - which culminated last year in a move to a shining, sprawling new building near Boston Harbor - ends in a somewhat somber note. Many of the most important scientists - including the founder - who discovered the two medicines are no longer with the company and the highly-science driven approach that was described in the first book seems to have taken a backseat to commercial pursuits. The future of the company is thus not completely certain, and Werth ends with an afterword in which he discusses the fate of big pharmaceutical companies which seem to be laying off thousands, making incremental advances and cutting each others' throats to bring the next "me-too" pill to market. Unlike Vertex, many of these organizations spend much more on marketing than on RD and are busy pleasing Wall Street and shareholders rather than patients. As Werth reminds us, if we want to advance the next groundbreaking medicines we need to remember George Merck's advice: focus on patients, the profits will follow. The story of Vertex provides both a shining example and a cautionary note.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Vertex Story continues
By Thomas J. Dougherty
Extremely interesting followup to his previous book (The Billion-Dollar Molecule: The Quest for the Perfect Drug) on the biotech company Vertex. Many of the characters from the prior book have either moved on to other ventures or moved up the corporate ladder. Werth traces the evolution of Vertex from a feisty startup focused on perfecting an immunological anti rejection compound for transplants to the more mature company with a different focus and portfolio that it has become over three decades. It also serves as a cautionary tale for the drive to keep a company afloat with investors and in placing too much emphasis (HepC) on a single disease and compound for a company's success. Vertex dominated the HepC market, but only for a brief instant in time. Eric Olson (who has left Vertex) spearheaded the cystic fibrosis program which is now the leading product and dominant revenue stream for the company. Read both books to see how the company started out to design drugs de novo from protein structural information, and by a very convoluted path ended up where it is today.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Epic Journey of Scientists trying to save the world
By Clergyboy
This book is amazing

because I never thought a corporation can have so many souls dancing inside, let alone a Pharma company. I want to say that I exaggerated only a little to compare this book's story to the 10 year Trojan War. What really touched me are the stories of individuals. The Bogers who "bore the torch" in the early days of doing great science and exploring the frontiers, the successors who financed and commercialized the founders' vision, the Wall Street analysts wanting to milk the new Pharmas like they did with the old, the patient advocates who wanted Vertex to remain true to its mission even when it is burning through hundreds of thousands of dollars a day... Those are real people competing viciously with selfish aims and playing out in a ruthless business world where billions of dollars would be won or lost on any single day. The deciding factors at the end of the day are two things: luck and balls. Who doesn't become excited when warm humanitarian ideas and cold hard cash were tossed together and shaken violently by a group of crazy scientists? I will have that straight up any day.

In this timely and much praised book, Barry Werth draws upon inside reporting that spans more than two decades. He provides a groundbreaking close-up of the upstart pharmaceutical company Vertex and the ferocious but indispensable world of Big Pharma that it inhabits. In 1989, the charismatic Joshua Boger left Merck, then America's most admired business, to found a drug company that would challenge industry giants and transform health care. Werth described the company's tumultuous early days during the AIDS crisis in *The Billion-Dollar Molecule*, a celebrated classic of science and business journalism. Now he returns to tell a riveting story of Vertex's bold endurance and eventual success. The \$325 billion-a-year pharmaceutical business is America's toughest and one of its most profitable. It's riskier and more rigorous at just about every stage than any other business, from the towering biological uncertainties inherent in its mission to treat disease; to the 30-to-1 failure rate in bringing out a successful medicine even after a molecule clears all the hurdles to get to human testing; to the multibillion-dollar cost of ramping up a successful product; to operating in the world's most regulated industry, matched only by nuclear power. Werth captures the full scope of Vertex's twenty-five-year drive to deliver breakthrough medicines. At a time when America struggles to maintain its innovative edge, *The Antidote* is a powerful inside look at one of the most intriguing and important business stories of recent decades.

From Booklist Werth, author and journalist, offers this sequel to *The Billion-Dollar Molecule* (1994), on the founding of the pharmaceutical company Vertex. Joshua Boger, founding scientist and president, along with a group of young scientists, set out in a garage to overtake the big drug companies. The author returns to Vertex to learn what it takes to succeed in science and business and sees that 22 years later and at about four times the anticipated cost, Vertex is now set to achieve Boger's initial goals: "Make better drugs, faster. Create the 21st century biopharmaceutical company. Become Merck, only better." Werth seeks to discover what Boger's vision has become and considers if it is a road map toward "a new biological epoch." We learn that "all progress in the pharmaceutical business is backbreaking, freighted with unknowns, and takes twice as long as you think it will." Now Vertex has nearly 2,000 employees, and it is about to debut the company's first drugs discovered and developed internally and commercialized under its own label. --Mary Whaley "A revealing, readable book about 'some of competitive capitalism's most complicated science and most cutthroat marketing maneuvers.'" ---Kirkus About the Author Barry Werth is an award-winning journalist and the acclaimed author of five books, including *The Billion-Dollar Molecule*, which was selected as one of *Fortune's* "75 Smartest Books We Know." Sean Pratt, a working actor for over twenty-five years, has performed at numerous regional theaters around the country. He is the author of *To Be or Wanna Be*, and he has recorded over seven hundred books in just about every genre, earning eight AudioFile Earphones Awards and four Audie Award nominations.