



# Side Effects: The Social Ecology of Adverse Drug Reactions

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HKT

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Side effects are common, but their origins and consequences remain unclear. Medications that target a disease can produce reactions far removed from it. Few side effects have been provably linked to a drug's active ingredients. But side effects matter: Many people are reluctant to take vaccines and other pharmaceuticals because of side effects, even if these reactions are minor compared to the disease a medication prevents or treats. Because side effects do not fit comfortably within the framework of modern medicine, they continue to confound. This talk will discuss the social origins of side effects and their consequences for patients, physicians, and the health care system. I will argue that side effects emerge from the interaction of cultural, institutional, and psychological factors. Side effects reflect how manufacturers and regulators evaluate the effectiveness and safety of a drug, as well as how physicians consider the risks and benefits. They are also influenced by the beliefs, expectations, and experiences that patients use to interpret their treatment and symptoms.



Jason Schnittker is Professor of Sociology and Department Chair at the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on the social, cultural, and biological determinants of health, with a special focus on mental health. Recent work has focused on the social determinants of anxiety and the social psychology of reintegration following incarceration in Rwanda.

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