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Medical Items through the Iron Curtain's Sliding Doors

Medical knowledge exchange among Eastern-Western countries was enhanced immediately after the end of WW2 and apparently precluded during the Cold War years (1948—1989).

A chance for investigation is offered through the analysis of medical items and their legal patents. Even if it could seem unethical as related to life-saving tools, the patent certifies the validity of basic research and its practical applications, while protecting its masterminds. Non-drugs and drugs production licenses were allowed to cross the borders, according to the business market and governments' feasibility.

During the late ,50s of the XX century, in former Czechoslovakia an original medical device, namely soft contact lenses to cope with visual impairment, was developed by Otto Wichterle (1913—1998) and his team. He suffered a political purge by his country's government and a state enterprise sold the first hydrogel contact lenses patent to a USA corporation, allowing a sub-license to a private American company.

Even antibiotics industry was a fruitful field, offering interaction through the iron curtain's sliding doors; indeed health and welfare business are not always linked to any imposed ideological diktat. After WW2 years, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), according to the European Recovery Program (Marshall plan), planned to build penicillin factories both in Eastern and Western European countries, as it happened also in Italy. It is not surprising that during the Cold War years not every public research center and State-owned antibiotic industry were supported by UNRRA, as it happened in Latvia.

Therefore intellectual property circulation beyond whatsoever ideology was allowed even under different by-laws and regulations.

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