



## NEWS

# Sixty seconds on . . . the Mohawk tribe

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## This isn't about some ancient practice touted by a dodgy alternative health guru, is it?

No, absolutely not. It's a contemporary tale of a drug manufacturer trying to ensure that its drug stays on patent.

### Interesting—tell me more

The Irish drug firm Allergan is transferring the patents for its dry eye treatment Restasis (cyclosporine ophthalmic emulsion) to the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. The tribe has sovereign status under US law, so the drug firm hopes that this will enable it to resist any legal challenges from generic drug makers.

### What's in it for the Mohawks?

Money. They get \$13.75m (£10.13m; €11.5m) this year, as well as royalties that could be worth as much as \$15m in subsequent years. Not a bad deal for the tribe, which numbers 13 000 and has an annual budget of £50m. And as the tribal council said in a statement, "We realise that we cannot depend solely on casino revenues."

### A win-win all round then?

A win for the Mohawks, particularly for a community that has significant social and health disadvantages. And a win for the drug company, which stands to protect sales worth \$1.5bn last year. But the generic drug manufacturers are, understandably,

not happy. And though the deal is legal, it certainly has a whiff about it. A blog on *Science Translational Medicine* was headlined, "Allergan pulls a fast one."<sup>1</sup>

### Isn't this another way of evergreening?

Evergreening is when manufacturers make drugs in slightly different formulations as a way of extending the patent. This latest ploy is a new tactic in pharma's ignoble battle to ensure high market share. Reformulating medicines, introducing fixed dose drug combinations, and modifying the dosage are all ways to extend the life of a patented drug.

### Evergreening is a rather benign sounding term, don't you think?

It is. Pharma seems to have a history of coming up with colourful terminology. A "patent troll" is someone who tries to swipe another company's patent. I also like the idea of the "drug pipeline."

### Shall we call this latest ploy "mohawking?"

Yes, let's try to patent it.

1 Lowe D. Allergan pulls a fast one. 2017. <http://blogs.sciencemag.org/pipeline/archives/2017/09/11/allergan-pulls-a-fast-one>.

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