



LYME DISEASE
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
ABN 46 417 706 647

For Lyme Disease Awareness & Action

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MEDIA RELEASE

Another Lyme-like patient's life lost to suicide

The Australian Lyme-like community lost one of their own to suicide last week. Scott Chant of Queensland lost his battle to overcome the illness after suffering from the denial and neglect Lyme-like patients routinely experience in the public health system. Upon hearing this, the community's outpouring of grief, frustration and fear was palpable. Some patients are frightened they are also at risk.

Though geographically dispersed across the nation, patient groups have formed to provide much needed friendship, empathy and insight into this misunderstood illness. Many of these patients, their families and friends have been writing heart breaking stories detailing the neglect and discrimination they have experienced from the public health system. These stories will be submitted to the Senate Inquiry into Lyme-like illness in Australia sponsored by Victorian Senator Madigan in November 2015.

Recently deceased Scott Chant sent in his submission just before he passed. He spoke of his struggle to get medical support for the frightening psychological symptoms he endured including suicide ideation. Sadly his desperation to end the pain and suffering he endured resulted in him passing away last week. The funeral was held 18th February in his local area in the Brisbane district.

Many patients have reported to LDAA feelings of helplessness, suicidal ideation and tragically some feel so defeated they have resorted to suicide believing it is the only option to end their suffering. Scott, like many other patients was subjected to the accepted practice of doctors in the public hospitals claiming their illness is in their heads, and being told there is no way he could have Lyme disease. No other disease requires proof of the cause of the illness before patients are acknowledged as sick, particularly if sick with mental illness.

There are no government guidelines for doctors to manage the locally acquired disease. Doctors are not trained and many feel intimidated by the stigma. As Professor Baggoley of Department of Health recently stated, "doctors who, because of the controversy about this, just do not want to have anything to do with this group of patients." Lyme-like illness is a poorly understood infectious disease most commonly acquired after a tick bite that has reached epidemic proportions around the world.

Further, compounding the problem the Australian guidelines for overseas acquired Lyme disease refer to treatment advice from the Infectious Diseases Society of America. These guidelines have recently been removed from the USA National Guidelines Clearinghouse because they are outdated and not in compliance with current standards.

LDAA currently has a record of over 1500 medically diagnosed cases of Lyme-like disease in Australia. The patient survey found 39.5% of patients report having suicidal thoughts. LDAA President Sharon Whiteman said, "Something must be done urgently before more Lyme-like patient's lives are lost to suicide. It is unconscionable that previously healthy Australians are left outside the public health system because the government has failed to understand this disease and develop an appropriate response".

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“Though it is too late for Scott, we want Scott’s death to stand for something. Enough is enough! Minister Ley cannot deny the harsh reality of Lyme-like illness any longer.”

The Senate inquiry is due to report 20 June 2016. LDAA’s submission will include recommendations to resolve this situation. The recommendations were first presented to the government two years ago. However, no action that helps patients has eventuated. LDAA is calling on the government to respond immediately and ensure real action addresses this travesty.

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Additional resources for media are available from the Lyme Disease Association of Australia’s [website](http://www.lymedisease.org.au/media)

Senate Inquiry page:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Lyme-like_Illness