

Leadership on Lyme-like Illness

– Election 2016 –



Facts

- There is widespread agreement that Australians are becoming sick after a tick bite
- There are opposing opinions on what is making them sick, but there has been no epidemiological investigation
- The nomenclature used to define, and the language used to describe Lyme disease is contentious, controversial and commonly derogatory
- Patients are caught in the middle of a scientific and medical argument, denied diagnosis and treatment
- Lack of evidence is a direct result of a lack of research and funding
- “Blood tests are relied upon but are unreliable” ~ Prof Chris Baggoley;
- Sick Australians are the evidence, in an emerging disease situations patient presentation leads to scientific proof
- World Health Organisation says ‘vector-borne disease is a global threat and entirely preventable’

‘Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence’

Challenges

- Lack of scientific integrity in the use of outdated research (1994) to justify claims that Lyme disease bacteria has not be found in Australia;
- The official definition for Lyme disease in the Australian context is too narrow and not in keeping with international advances in vector-borne disease;
- Accepted practice of ascription of patient symptoms of Lyme-like illness to psychological causes;
- Persistent lack of leadership from the Department of Health and four successive Health Ministers
- Lack of coordinated policy response to negate the stigma and take definitive action in this emerging, epidemic disease situation;
- The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and medical boards continue to pursue and restrict Lyme-like treating physicians.

Opportunities & Immediate Interventions

- Government leadership to embrace local and international expertise in to develop a multi-disciplinary public health policy and research based on world’s best practice;
- Acceptance of tests from overseas laboratories who find the pathogens in Australians and who are parties to the international Mutual Recognition Arrangements recently finalised by NATA;
- Review of discordant pathology processes, tests, standards and accreditation process; and
- Education throughout the public health system to aid recognition, legitimacy and prevention.

‘Australia has the opportunity be showcased on the world stage with a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, public health response’



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