



LYME DISEASE
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
ABN 46 417 706 647

For Lyme Disease Awareness & Action

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MEDIA RELEASE

Exposed - evidence of an Australian Lyme disease

Lyme Disease Association of Australia (LDAA) has exposed evidence of an Australian Lyme disease from an accepted 1995 Phd thesis from University of Newcastle. Also an associated 7:30 Report story from 1992 that portrays both a breakthrough discovery and suffering patients who needed treatment. Last week Dr Michelle Wills' reached out saying, 'The other night I was watching the story of the current Lyme disease victims. They're not getting treatment, and it breaks my heart.'

The 1992 ABC's 7.30 Report aired a story highlighting how scientist Michelle Wills with little funding and sceptical support discovered the bacteria known to cause Lyme disease, called *Borrelia*, in Australian ticks. The discovery was at the time confirmed by Professor Alan Barbour's US laboratory researchers as almost identical to *Borrelia burgdorferi*, but that further research was needed.

Professor Barbour is currently with the Medicine and Microbiology & Molecular Genetics, School of Medicine, University of California. Professor Barbour is one of the pioneers in the Lyme disease field having worked with Willy Burgdorfer (who the disease is named after) to identify the cause of Lyme and having been the first to isolate and grow the bacteria in the laboratory.

Tragically, Wills' significant research was not pursued. 25 years later authorities are denying there is any evidence of Lyme disease in Australia. LDAA President Sharon Whiteman says, 'When bureaucrats consistently use obscure language, semantics and contradictory arguments to stonewall progress, any seasoned political observer must start to wonder why. Why is a patient group denied treatment and denigrated by the authorities who are supposed to be there to help them? What do powerful people do when they are on the cusp of being exposed as neglecting their sworn duties and protecting their turf? Perhaps the story of Lyme-like illness in Australia is a good example of what happens.'

The Senate Inquiry into the 'Growing evidence of an emerging tick-borne disease that causes a Lyme-like illness for many Australian patients' has heard evidence of desperation, suicide and fury from patients. The patients have been told they can't be sick because there is no evidence in Australia of a bacteria that is named after a town called Lyme in America where it was initially discovered. Patients don't care what the bacteria is called. They want to know what is making them sick.

Australia's former Chief Medical Officer Prof Baggoley¹ freely admitted pathology testing for this illness is unreliable. Even so, the public health system requires a positive test result before treatment is prescribed. The official test looks for the American strain of the disease that the authorities deny exists in Australia. Tests for other pathogens known to be transferred by ticks in Australia are not routinely undertaken.

If pathogens are found, the pathology results will be declared 'false positive' if the patient hasn't travelled to an endemic area overseas. Australia will not be considered an endemic area until there is proof the disease

¹ See: Department of Health, Supplementary Estimates hearing, Senate Hansard, 21 October 2015, p. 19

is here, but doctors can't do that with negative results nor without evidence that the bacteria has been found in Australian ticks. Wills' disregarded research discovered just that in 1991. Further, she had hoped to develop a test that would assist with diagnosis. But her research goals remained unfunded.

The patients who are refused treatment and left to fend for themselves can only wonder why authorities didn't follow up on Dr Wills' promising research. Patients desperately need a solution which, when denied in Australia are often found overseas. The US Lyme disease expert who treats many Australian patients, Dr Richard Horowitz gave evidence at the recent Senate inquiry public hearing as did an Australian treating doctor. Local and international doctors report a 70-75% success rates.

LDAA President Sharon Whiteman said, 'LDAA has exposed to the public and senators 25 year old research completed by Dr Wills that should have been the basis for more research and an effective health policy. If those responsible had taken action lives would have been saved and suffering alleviated. The 'there's no evidence' camp who deny Lyme disease is in Australia cherry pick research to defend their position and justify denying treatment based on flawed pathology. It is time for a new approach based on world's best practice and successful treatment, not dogmatic denial. LDAA has provided the Senate committee with numerous recommendations for the final report and we believe that by working together we can find a solution for the thousands of patients who are desperately unwell.'

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1992 7:30 Report - Lyme Ticks

https://www.facebook.com/LymeDiseaseAustralia/?hc_ref=PAGES_TIMELINE&fref=nf

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

Senate Inquiry page:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Lymelikeillness45

LDAA submission no. 528, recommendations can be found p.8

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