



Worldwide Lyme Awareness Project

for Lyme Borreliosis & Tick-borne Disease
Awareness in Australia & Worldwide

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MEDIA RELEASE

Patients to shine a light on Lyme disease

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Australian Lyme disease patients and their supporters are again planning a local campaign as part of the Worldwide Lyme Awareness Project (WWLAP), with events scheduled across Australia from 16 -18 May 2014.

The national program is being sponsored this year by the Lyme Disease Association of Australia (LDAA). Sharon Whiteman, the LDAA's President, said local patient groups are staging events across Australia to help raise awareness of Lyme disease, a potentially debilitating illness that can be contracted through tick bites.

"Awareness-raising is important because the Australian medical profession continues to deny the possibility of locally acquired Lyme disease." Whiteman said.

"People presenting to a GP with obvious Lyme symptoms are denied early intervention treatment and provided alternate diagnoses when their symptoms progress into the later, more serious stages of the disease."

Health authorities say there is no evidence of Lyme disease in Australia, basing their position on a 1994 study of Australian ticks that failed to find the bacteria known to cause Lyme disease in America.

Sharon Whiteman disagrees with this position: "Our most recent survey of patients involved over 800 Australians with a confirmed diagnosis of Lyme disease and these represent only a small portion of the thousands we know to have contracted the infection."

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Inaugural 2013 WWLAP Countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States

“People are becoming seriously ill while being denied proper medical treatment because a cause for our Lyme-like illness has not yet been discovered in Australia.”

In the early stages of Lyme disease, usually following a tick bite, some patients will display a rash, headaches and flu-like symptoms. If left untreated, it can develop into a debilitating multi-systemic illness, with symptoms ranging from chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia to severe physical and mental impairment.

“The tragedy of our situation is that Lyme disease is treatable.” Ms Whiteman said.

“If treated early the chances of full recovery are good, but left untreated Lyme disease can totally destroy lives.”

One of the national organisers for the Lyme awareness campaign, Karen Smith, agrees: “Education of the health care sector is essential because patients are being misdiagnosed with other conditions and prescribed treatments that are ineffective.”

Ms Smith, who also represents Australia on the international campaign committee, said Lyme disease is now outranking AIDS as the fastest-growing infectious disease in America.

“Australians are being put at risk because the medical community is not prepared to deal with this impending epidemic,” she said.

“We need to raise awareness for both health practitioners and the general public to prevent the spread of this infection.”

Awareness events across Australia will offer a variety of social activities and educational resources, with some events screening the US documentary, *‘Under Our Skin’*. The events will coincide with the *LymeLight* campaign, where key buildings, landmarks and private dwellings will glow lime green at night in support of the Lyme awareness campaign.

Sharon Whiteman said some progress has been made since last year’s campaign, with the Department of Health having established a clinical advisory committee to review the situation regarding Lyme disease in Australia.

“Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Baggoley, has issued a formal advisory notice to Australian clinicians suggesting doctors should not rule out the possibility of Lyme disease as a diagnosis,” she said.

The LDAA has a patient representative on the advisory committee and has submitted formal input to the review process, but Sharon Whiteman believes this process could be too slow for many sufferers.

“We’re concerned that the focus of this committee continues to be on finding a bacterium known to cause Lyme disease overseas, instead of recognising that thousands of Australians suffering from a Lyme-like illness need affordable treatment now.

“Patients who have been lucky enough to find a doctor to diagnose and treat Lyme disease are already getting better and some have been able to resume normal lives and contribute to society again.

“This disease is not just costing individuals, it’s also taxing the Australian economy if people remain sick when they could be well with proper treatment,” she said.

“People interested to know more about Lyme disease can come along to an awareness event, where Lyme patients will be on hand to offer information and support.”

Lyme Awareness event locations can be found via the dedicated campaign website www.lymeactionaustralia.com, while a full media kit on can be obtained from the Lyme Disease Association of Australia’s website www.lymedisease.org.au/media.

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