

Hansard – House of Reps – March 16th, 2016

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (11:46): When Galileo pointed to the evidence that the Earth and the other planets revolved around the sun, he was persecuted by the Catholic Church. He was forced to agree not to teach the heresy anymore and he spent the rest of his life under house arrest. We tut-tut with condescension at the lack of intellectual openness of the church in the 17th century, but it seems to me that the attachment to dogma is alive and well in pockets of the medical profession. The rigid attachment to the proposition that one cannot contract Lyme disease or Lyme-like diseases from Australian ticks is one such example.

I have seen firsthand the impact of this mediaeval reluctance to consider the evidence. Indeed, one of my interns, as an 11-year-old boy, was bitten by a tick and went through years of being diagnosed as having a psychosomatic illness that kept him from school for two years. Thanks to the diligence of his mother, he was eventually cured after they found a doctor who treated his classic Lyme-like symptoms with antibiotics.

A Perth woman, Trudi Marchant, has written to me about her son Louis, who was bitten by a tick when he was working on a wheat bin in Carnamah in 2013 at the age of 17. From being in perfect health, his health collapsed entirely over the next few months. The diagnosis and the treatment proposed by various specialists was ineffective and, in some cases bordered on the bizarre. She eventually found a doctor specialising in chronic fatigue syndrome and made progress after the application of antibiotics. She observed:

I have found the intransigence of the medical profession in refusing to investigate, diagnose and treat patients with tick-borne infections beyond belief and bordering on criminal negligence. The evidence indicating the lack of tick-borne infection appears to be incontrovertible in Louis's case. The lack of clinical evidence and accepted diagnosis and treatment protocols arising from this medical intransigence also has adverse impacts on all aspects of the healthcare system and associated legal and financial consequences. We must rely on expensive and frequently inaccurate overseas testing, and, in our case, expensive diagnosis and treatments through Skype consultations with a practitioner in the US. We also have to rely on diagnosis and treatment outside accepted peer reviewed science, and risks entailing such ineffective treatment and effects of long-term antibiotic use.

I was very pleased to be able to attend this week the launch of the Parliamentary Friends of Lyme Disease to support the Lyme Disease Association of Australia and to support those doctors who are open to treating these conditions and to support the cause of research.

It is good to see that the lobbying by these groups is having some impact and the Commonwealth Department of Health now, at least, is recognising the need for research on these fronts. In particular, we must see the work led by Professor Irwin of Murdoch University in Western Australia into the bacterial cocktails of Australian ticks receive ongoing funding. This is groundbreaking work and has the potential to halt the plethora of false negative pathology tests both in Australia and worldwide. This is a very serious condition and it is one that is capable of being dealt with. Again, I really urge the government to ensure that we properly fund the research so that we can have here in Australia the first-class treatment for this condition that we see in countries like the United States and Germany.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (11:50): I rise to speak about the Bentley Hospital in my electorate of Swan, but, before the member for Perth leaves, I would like to acknowledge her support for Lyme disease. I am

Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, and we recently ran a morning session on Lyme disease. It is on the Hansard record, if you want to check it. It was a very adversarial hearing, and there was evidence taken from both sides of the argument. I congratulate the member for Perth on her support for the Lyme disease cause.