

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000764

OUTCOME: 9 - Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: Lyme Disease - Treatment

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Madigan, John

Question:

It is cruel and inhumane to expect sick people to wait while the debate about this disease drags on. What practical steps has the Department of Health done to alleviate the suffering of people with Lyme and Lyme-like disease? How is it ensuring and monitoring these patients are receiving appropriate treatment to return to good health?

Answer:

The Department of Health began working with Lyme disease patient advocacy groups in early 2013 and since then has taken steps to better understand the position of patients and their families. Departmental officials communicate with patients and their families as well as other medical practitioners concerned with the multiple nonspecific chronic debilitating symptoms that they are experiencing.

The Department commissioned a scoping study to better understand what research questions should be asked and then made these questions publically available. The Department encourages medical practitioners who see these patients to work with general practice and public health academic units in medical schools so that patient-based clinical research can be undertaken. The Department has contracted the National Serology Reference Laboratory to evaluate in vitro diagnostic assays used in the serological diagnosis of Lyme disease. A treatment round table facilitated by Dr Norman Swan was held in Sydney on 27 May 2014. This meeting, which was focussed on the treatment of patients made a number of research recommendations which have been added to the list of research questions available at the Department's Lyme disease webpage <http://www.health.gov.au/lyme-disease#research-projects>.