

SELECTMEN'S OFFICE
TOWN OF SHERMAN
P.O. Box 39
9 Route 39 North
Sherman, CT 06784
(860) 355-1139 Fax (860) 355-6943

Testimony Regarding Public Health Committee HB 6200

I offer this testimony in support of Proposed Bill No. 6200, An Act Concerning the Use of Long-Term Antibiotics for the Treatment of Lyme Disease.

I regret that I am unable to attend today's hearing due to pressing matters arising from my position as First Selectman of the Town of Sherman. I write both as the First Selectman of a town that has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the State and also as a professional registered nurse.

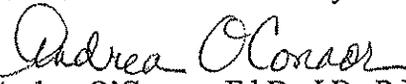
The proposed legislation will permit the use of long-term antibiotic therapy for patients with persistent Lyme disease, with the goal of preventing the potentially debilitating long-term effects of the disease. It will mark an important step in eliminating the artificial restraint on the physician-patient relationship imposed by third-party insurers, whose motivation is at times more financial than therapeutic.

Lyme disease is a difficult disease to diagnose, and its presenting symptoms vary from individual to individual. Because of the difficulty in diagnosing the disease, treatment often is delayed. When treatment is delayed, the disease requires longer-term antibiotic therapy to eradicate the illness and alleviate life-altering symptoms. Physicians prescribe such therapies based on anecdotal data derived from a careful assessment of the individual patient and his or her response both to the disease and its treatment.

The use of anecdotal data, which results in a personalized treatment plan, is not an unusual occurrence in the medical field, where there currently exists a dearth of evidenced-based research to support one or another treatment option for a variety of diseases. The lack of agreement in the scientific and medical communities concerning an evidenced-based approach to the treatment of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases argues for more flexibility for physicians treating this disease.

As a nation, we are painfully aware of the need to control the cost of health care. Yet we seem unwilling to recognize that the long-term costs of the failure to adequately treat this very elusive and stubborn disease. This short-sightedness is not confined to Lyme disease, but Lyme disease presents a dramatic example since the long-term effects of its inadequate treatment results in thousands of dollars spent in rehabilitation costs and disability payments, to say nothing of the human suffering that accompanies persistent Lyme disease.

The proposed legislation is an important step forward in recognizing the complexity in treating a disease named for a Connecticut community and now prevalent across our State.


Andrea O'Connor, Ed.D., J.D., R.N.
First Selectman

February 6, 2009