Chronic Lyme disease scams dangerous in many ways

By ACSH Staff — December 9, 2010

Yesterday’s Chicago Tribune included a long feature story by reporters Patricia Callahan and Trine Tsouderos on a nationwide scare over a non-existent malady called chronic Lyme disease.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross, who treated Lyme disease when he practiced as a rheumatologist, comments that, “while it can sometimes be difficult to diagnose, Lyme disease is very real. It is transmitted by the bite of a deer tick, typically in the northeast and in Wisconsin and Minnesota, usually during the summer months. An infected tick transmits the Lyme bacterium in its bite, but the condition is usually responsive to a variety of oral antibiotics. On rare occasions, intravenous treatment is required.”

Unlike Lyme disease, however, chronic Lyme disease is a pseudo-disease. “Every infectious disease expert agrees on this,” says Dr. Ross, “Yet since researchers at Yale first figured out what Lyme disease was in the late 1970s, there has gradually appeared this faddish diagnosis, chronic Lyme disease. It’s replaced fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome as a diagnosis for many people complaining of vague generalized symptoms, especially fatigue. A range of physicians — some well-intentioned, many not — have turned to it as an explanation. From this have come an assortment of expensive and potentially dangerous treatments for a condition that simply does not exist.”

The Tribune reporters describe numerous patients undergoing costly and difficult long-term antibiotic treatments. ACSH’s Susan Ingber notes that, “long-term antibiotic treatment is dangerous for public health as it can lead to the development of disease-resistant strains of bacteria.” The reporters go on to detail cases in which unapproved treatments with heavy metals and unknown substances led to patient deaths. In addition, the article examines the ways in which proponents of expensive treatments for this fictitious ailment have gained influence over politicians, journalists and philanthropists — in spite of the repeated warnings and advisories of medical authorities.

ACSH would like to commend the authors on a piece of superb reporting exposing this dangerous deception.
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