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Settlement Announced in Landmark Investigation of Lyme Disease Diagnosis and Treatment Guidelines

Patients' Rights Groups Applaud Connecticut Attorney General Blumenthal's Settlement in Anti-trust Case Against Powerful Medical Society

Hartford, CT, May 1, 2008 – Patients' rights groups today hailed Connecticut Attorney General Blumenthal's announcement of a settlement in a landmark antitrust investigation into the Lyme treatment guidelines of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA).

"My office uncovered undisclosed financial interests held by several of the most powerful IDSA panelists," said Blumenthal. "The IDSA's guideline panel improperly ignored, or minimized, consideration of alternative medical opinion and evidence regarding chronic Lyme disease, potentially raising serious questions about whether the recommendations reflected all relevant science."

The groundbreaking settlement announced today forces a complete review of the IDSA guidelines by a new panel free from conflicts of interest, specifically excluding previous panel members. This panel will consider a range of scientific evidence in a public forum broadcast live over the internet and will be overseen by a specialist in financial conflicts of interest in medicine.

"This settlement makes it clear that the IDSA guideline development process was corrupted by a commercially driven panel that excluded evidence supporting longer term treatment of Lyme disease," said attorney Lorraine Johnson, Executive Director of the California Lyme Disease Association (CALDA). "This settlement allows suppressed scientific viewpoints and evidence to be heard, and it is promising news for patients."

This is the first-ever antitrust investigation against a medical society's guidelines development process.

"We congratulate Attorney General Blumenthal for exposing the IDSA's conflicts of interest and helping reduce the suffering of Lyme patients everywhere," said Pat Smith, president of the national Lyme Disease Association (LDA). Diane Blanchard, co-president of Time for Lyme adds, "The IDSA guidelines are dangerous for patients who suffer longer-term Lyme symptoms that do not fall within the IDSA's narrow disease definition."

The IDSA guidelines are treated as mandatory within the medical community. More than 50 physicians who use longer-term treatment approaches have been investigated or sanctioned by state medical boards. The guidelines can also result in financial problems for patients, since insurance companies refuse to reimburse for longer-term treatment and pharmacies may refuse to fill prescriptions.

The majority of individuals involved in the IDSA guidelines development process held direct or indirect commercial interests related to Lyme vaccines, patents, and/or test kits, and did not take the opinions or experiences of the competing Lyme groups into account.

While the announcement of a settlement comes as a huge relief to suffering Lyme patients, the case has much broader implications for a health care system that often contends with conflicts-of-interest in guideline processes – guidelines which are often used by insurance companies to limit diagnosis and treatment options.

“Today’s settlement marks an important victory for all patients who suffer Lyme disease, but it is also a victory for anyone concerned about health care,” said Johnson.

“Commercially driven guidelines that limit patient treatment options are a major issue today in healthcare, and this decision marks an important step towards addressing it.”

The national Lyme Disease Association, (LDA), CALDA, and Time for Lyme are non-profit organizations that were founded by individuals who had personal experience with Lyme disease, in order to address the lack of education and support services available for this newly emerging infection.

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