



Rell signs Lyme disease bill in Brookfield

By Robert Miller
Staff Writer

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BROOKFIELD -- Dr. Monica Bolesta contracted Lyme disease in 2006, leaving her in so much pain she could hardly move.

She was misdiagnosed for a year before she finally found a doctor who began to treat her with antibiotics -- treatment that continues in New York to this day.

"I'm 85 percent better," said Bolesta, a Brookfield woman who sits on the town's Lyme Disease Task Force.

Bolesta's need to travel to New York for treatment points to many doctors' reluctance to treat people for chronic Lyme disease.

Because many medical guidelines only allow a two- to four-week course of antibiotics to treat Lyme disease, many doctors decline to exceed that.

But Gov. M. Jodi Rell removed one impediment for treatment Thursday by signing a bill at Town Hall that allows doctors to prescribe long-term antibiotics to patients with Lyme disease without fear of hearing from state medical regulators.

"We do understand," Rell said at the signing,

surrounded by town leaders, legislators and Lyme disease advocates. "We understand that this disease can shatter lives. We understand it can rob someone of their livelihood. We understand that it can alter someone's future forever."

Lyme disease is caused by infection with a bacterial spirochete --*Borrelia burgdorferi*. Black-legged ticks spread the bacteria from wild animals -- chiefly white-footed mice -- to humans. The state's abundant herd of white-tailed deer harbor the ticks and are chiefly responsible for spreading the ticks throughout the state.

Most people with Lyme disease recognize its symptoms -- fever, headache, body ache and fatigue, often accompanied by a rash at the site of the tick bite -- and recover completely after a short course of antibiotics.

But diagnosing people with chronic Lyme infection has aroused controversy.

One of the leading medical associations in the U.S. -- the Infectious Disease Society of America, or IDSA -- insist there is no such thing as chronic Lyme disease.

Chronic Lyme disease appears to cause a bewildering host of symptoms including arthritis, muscle and joint pain, severe headaches, debilitating fatigue and "brain fog" that can include memory loss and depression.

According to the IDSA, treating patients with antibiotics for months or years for a non-

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existent illness is useless, expensive and injurious to the patients' health.

But other doctors and many patients disagree.

They say growing scientific evidence suggests Lyme bacteria can survive in people for a long time, causing myriad problems. For them, getting long-term antibiotic treatment has been essential to recovery.

Debate is especially hot in Connecticut, which has the highest per-capita rate of Lyme disease in the United States.

Jennifer Reid, of Ridgefield, who leads an area campaign to prevent Lyme disease, said the legislation Rell signed Thursday will give doctors the option of treating patients with longer courses of antibiotics.

"Patients have told us that their doctors wouldn't extend their antibiotics beyond the guideline," Reid said. "This bill allows doctors to really treat the symptoms."

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Lyme disease In 2008, Connecticut had 3,896 diagnosed cases of Lyme disease compared to 3,058 in 2007. For every diagnosed case of Lyme disease, officials estimate at least 10 go untreated. Danbury-area town 2008 totals for

Lyme disease: Bethel: 24 Bridgewater: 2
Brookfield: 17 Danbury: 51 Kent: 8 New Fairfield:
39 New Milford: 56 Newtown: 62 Redding: 19
Ridgefield: 40 Roxbury: 6 Sherman: 7 Southbury:
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