

Position Statement:

Debilitating Symptom Complexes Attributed to Ticks

The Australian Government acknowledges that there is a group of Australian patients suffering from the symptoms of a chronic debilitating illness, which many associate with a tick bite. The Australian Government has chosen to describe this patient group as having Debilitating Symptom Complexes Attributed to Ticks (DSCATT). This term was carefully considered to appropriately acknowledge this patient group and the multifaceted illness they are experiencing, whilst moving away from the stigma and controversy associated with the use of "Lyme Disease", "Lyme disease-like Illness" and "Chronic Lyme Disease" that has previously been used to describe this patient group.

Many of these patients experiencing debilitating symptom complexes are living in turmoil as their illness is poorly understood, making accurate diagnosis and treatment difficult. It is imperative for government health authorities, clinicians and patients alike to remain open minded as to the causes of these symptoms and work together to achieve a patient-centred multidisciplinary approach to their care.

The Australian Government is currently working with key stakeholders to investigate an evidence-based and flexible multidisciplinary care model that can be applied in both private and public healthcare settings. It is hoped that this model will provide patients with a comprehensive assessment of their symptoms and ensure that a potential diagnosis is not overlooked. Because of the imprecise nature of the symptom complexes some patients will remain undiagnosed; therefore ways to manage ongoing symptoms through a comprehensive patient-centred care plan will also be investigated.

The Australian Government continues to support research into determining the cause of these debilitating symptom complexes along with innovative health care models to support the needs of this patient group. It is hoped that the National Health and Medical Research Council's \$3.0 million targeted call for research into debilitating symptom complexes attributed to ticks will encourage researchers to further investigate this complex issue.

Unfortunately some patients presenting with classical Lyme disease or debilitating symptom complexes have not had positive experiences in the Australian health care system, and this has been largely due to the controversy and stigma attached to Lyme disease in Australia.

To ensure that both the general public and health professionals have current evidence-based information and are able to distinguish between classical Lyme disease and DSCATT, the Australian Government will undertake to raise the awareness of both these illnesses. It is hoped that this information will help patients and health professionals better understand tick borne illnesses, keep an open mind to the cause of debilitating symptom complexes and result in a positive and consistent approach to diagnosis, treatment and ongoing management.