

30/11/2016

Dear Ms Radcliffe,

I am writing in response to a submission that was made to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee by Ms Janice Foster.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this submission.

In Ms Janice Foster's submission, she referred to an article published for News.Com.Au titled "The Great Australian Lyme Conspiracy". I have responded to her concerns below:-

- The information I presented in the article was not new information, but was a summary of the scientific consensus in a narrative format.
- The article was fully researched and I spoke with many colleagues including Infectious Disease Physicians, Microbiologists, Pathologists and General Practitioners. Medical colleagues read my drafts and evaluated the information presented in my article to ensure that it was accurate at the time it was published.
- The article is consistent with the current scientific consensus in Australia. I provided reference to the Clinical Advisory Committee on Lyme Disease (CACLD) in my article, stating that "In 2014 the CACLD concluded there was "no routine finding of Borrelia in ticks in Australia". An updated statement was released in February 2016 by the Department of Health, reiterating that "so far there is no conclusive evidence of a causative agent in Australia". Subsequently, after my article was published, the Medical Journal of Australia (MJA) published a scientific article titled 'Does Lyme disease exist in Australia?' (Med J Aust 2016; 205 (9): 413-417) which was consistent with the information provided in the article published in News.Com.Au.
- As a medical practitioner I understand the requirement to cite sources, if I am writing an academic paper. However citing sources is not a requirement when writing an article for News.Com.Au.

Purpose of the article

- The article was written to call for more research to be done to help people suffering from an emerging tick-borne illness and to highlight the dangers for people in search of a diagnosis, treatment and management for their medical condition, who are often desperate and vulnerable.
- The article provides a current scientific understanding of Lyme disease in Australia and I do not believe my article was condescending or mocking in tone. To have done so would have defeated the purpose of writing about this important medical topic.

Patient Privacy

- Concern about my patient's privacy is unfounded as details were suitably altered to protect my patient's identity.

“Questionable in-put” and “latest offering” when commenting on Yolanda Hadid comparing Lyn disease to HIV

- I commented on Yolanda Hadid's statements, saying that it is rare for Lyme disease to cause mortality, but there still is considerable morbidity. Lyme disease is well known to cause significant damage to many different parts of the human body if it is not diagnosed & treated early. In short, I explained that Lyme disease is a serious infection that needs to be treated appropriately.

Yours faithfully

Dr Brad McKay MBBS FRACGP