

Nova Scotia Legislature

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Murray Scott

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First Session

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HEALTH - SYSTEM: LYME DISEASE - TREATMENT PREP.

MR. DARRELL DEXTER (leader, NDP NS): Mr. Speaker, five years ago, Kelly Burke was bitten by a tick in New Ross and she contracted Lyme disease. She didn't get a diagnosis right away. In fact, she didn't get a diagnosis in this province at all. Ignored by the medical system here, she travelled to the United States and paid over \$5,000 out of her own pocket to get a test which concluded beyond a doubt that she has Lyme disease. So my question for the Minister of Health is this; we already know Lyme disease is present in the tick population in Nova Scotia, so why isn't our health system better prepared to deal with these cases?

HON. ANGUS MACISAAC: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member raises a very interesting question and I will take that question as notice and get back to him.

MR. DEXTER: Mr. Speaker, maybe I can inform the minister just a little bit. Kelly Burke was tested with an antibody screening test that came back negative and it turns out that this test which the Department of Health administers is accurate only 65 per cent of the time and doctors are encouraged to look at symptoms as well as tests before ruling out Lyme disease. Lyme disease becomes less treatable over time and Ms. Burke's nearly five-year delay in treatment has resulted in chronic pain which she will likely never escape. I want to ask the Minister of Health, why even after she tested positive for Lyme disease, did Kelly Burke have to fight for months before she received treatment?

MR. MACISAAC: Mr. Speaker, despite the honourable member's preamble, I don't find that I have any more to contribute in terms of an answer now, but I will in fact investigate the situation and I would be very pleased to get back to him.

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MR. DEXTER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't expect wisdom to just kind of spring up from below the minister's feet, but for his edification I will table a document from the QE II from 2002 that states that there have been no cases of Lyme disease acquired in Nova Scotia. This is clearly not true. Health officials in this province need to get their heads out of the sand, Lyme disease is here to stay. My final question to the minister is this, knowing that Lyme disease has been in this province for at least five years and that Ms. Burke is unlikely to be the only case, what steps will his department take to ensure that no other family has to go through the anguish the Burkes have faced?

MR. MACISAAC: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member certainly describes a situation that's most unfortunate and not something that any of us like to see any individuals endure. Inasmuch as it is appropriate for us to be in a position to respond to this, I will certainly be asking the department to give me a full briefing as to the entire situation and how we can best respond to it so that situations as described by the honourable member would not occur in the future.