

Need of interdisciplinary competence and the role of the Department of Health in the Struggle against Lyme borreliosis

W.O. Pavan

S U M M A R Y

Lyme borreliosis is the most frequent vector-borne disease in North America and Europe. Currently the most important way to face it is prevention with the diffusion of correct information. The principal goals of prevention are to avoid tick bites and to stop the progression of the disease. These results are obtained by a correct behavior and, in case of a tick bite, by proper procedures that can reduce the risk of infection. Patients need to be instructed about the correct tick removal method and about the possible signs and symptoms of the disease. The use of prophylactic antimicrobials following a tick bite is not recommended. Due to the problems of scarce sensitivity, specificity and standardization, serological tests should not be used as screening method.

K E Y W O R D S

Lyme
borreliosis,
prevention

Lyme borreliosis (LB) is the most frequent vector-borne disease in North America and Europe. However, certain confusion still exists, partly due to the scarce circulation of correct information (1, 2, 3, 4). In Italy (5) there is scarce perception of this pathology and the tendency to submit information to the mass-media by "apparent experts" has often furnished incorrect and also risky information.

Due to the impossibility to eliminate the vector or the reservoirs (6, 7), and because no vaccination is available in Europe, currently the most important way to face LB is prevention (8, 9). This implicates the necessity for faultless information that is actively distributed among physicians as well as laymen. What has happened in Italy and in other countries, however, shows that there is a lack of such information, with the result

that people today are familiar with rickettsial diseases or have heard about the so-called "killer tick" but don't know the real facts about the problems associated with LB. Nevertheless we are in an advantageous situation for at least two reasons: 1) LB has not yet reached diffusion equal to that in the USA or in some European countries close to us; 2) we can utilize the experience from the USA and are therefore able to avoid the same mistakes that have been made there.

The activity of spreading correct information is one of the assignments of the Department of Health, but every physician should provide competent advice. Scientifically well-founded information must not be confused with contradictory information and alarming and unserious news needs to be avoided (10, 11, 12).

Prevention is an effective method, when performed

