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DTC public symposium May 1 will focus Lyme disease, ticks

Lyme and other tick borne diseases are increasing at a rapid rate in Fairfield County and Connecticut. To foster greater understanding of the subject, the New Canaan Democratic Town Committee will host "The Deer Tick Dilemma: A Public Symposium" at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 1, in the Town Hall Auditorium.

Four expert panelists will focus on the latest legal, medical and research developments concerning Lyme disease. Each will speak to their area of expertise for five to 10 minutes, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal is serving an unprecedented fifth term in that office. He has led aggressive law enforcement in consumer protection, environmental stewardship, labor rights and personal privacy, and has been instrumental in recovering hundreds of millions of dollars for Connecticut taxpayers and consumers each year, according to a press release. Mr. Blumenthal will deliver an update on the investigation his office began last November to determine whether anti-competitive practices have tainted the development of national guidelines on Lyme treatment and diagnostics.

State Rep. William Tong of the 147th district, serving New Canaan and Stamford, will speak on the bill he is co-sponsoring that calls for the reinstatement of mandatory lab reporting of all Lyme disease cases in the state and the establishment of a Connecticut Lyme Disease Task Force. Whereas reported cases in the Northeast have been steadily on the rise since 2000, Connecticut's reported cases dropped significantly in 2003 when the Department of Public Health discontinued its policy of having laboratories report positive Lyme tests. As a result, Connecticut receives little to no national funding for research and treatment of Lyme. The proposed task force would be charged to review the ways Lyme disease is impacting Connecticut and create a comprehensive plan for Lyme education and prevention.

Leo Shea III, Ph.D. is chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Research Fund for Tick-Borne Diseases (NRFTD), clinical assistant professor of rehabilitation medicine at the New York University School of Medicine and a staff psychologist at the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine.

The NRFTD is a nonprofit organization devoted to raising funds in support of scientific research on tick-borne diseases which has raised more than \$1 million. Dr. Shea will focus on projects funded by the NRFTD.

Steven Phillips, M.D., immediate past president of the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society (ILADS), has been researching Lyme disease for more than 15 years. ILADS is a nonprofit, international medical society, dedicated to the diagnosis and appropriate treatment of Lyme and its associated diseases. The Web site www.ilads.org states that Lyme is hard to diagnose because fewer than half of all patients recall a tick bite or develop the signature erythema migrans ("bullseye" rash). As a result, many patients go untreated and develop psychiatric and/or neurological symptoms. Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD)-like syndrome, Autism-like syndrome, psychosis, and depression are just a few of the many manifestations of late stage Lyme disease, according to ILADS.

Sally Hines will moderate the panel.

The symposium will be taped for broadcast by New Canaan Public Access Channel 79.

Handouts from the Center for Disease Control and a list of references to Web sites with further information on Lyme and other tick borne diseases will be available at the door.

Questions about the event can be directed to Kira Brandman at 966-0830.