

# Foes, backers testify on long-term Lyme drugs

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By KATHY McCORMACK The Associated Press

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CONCORD, N.H. – Marie Veselsky was a long-distance runner who was in good health. In 2005, she started feeling muscle aches and dizziness and had problems walking up stairs. Nearly a year later, she was diagnosed with Lyme disease and was put on antibiotics.

After eight months on the drugs — and nearly three years later — she feels much better.

## Additional Photos

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Marie Veselsky of Plymouth, N.H., who has spent eight months on antibiotics for Lyme disease, testifies before a state Senate panel Monday in favor of a bill to allow long-term antibiotic treatment for Lyme disease without board disciplinary action. The Associated Press “I am able to run again, and I feel very lucky,” Veselsky, 56, of Plymouth testified Monday at a Senate committee hearing on a Lyme disease treatment bill.

She said her doctor did the right thing by prescribing the antibiotics, though he was going against standard guidelines.

The bill would allow doctors in New Hampshire to give antibiotics to Lyme disease patients beyond a few weeks without fear of disciplinary action by medical boards. Current national guidelines recommend against such treatment, saying there's no evidence it is effective.

The guidelines have divided the two main organizations dedicated to Lyme disease research. As a result, some patients testified that it has been difficult to find doctors willing to provide long-term antibiotic treatment for the disease.

"We don't want to solve the debate," said Greg Kettmann, 53, of Bow, whose wife began having symptoms including chest pains in 2001 but wasn't diagnosed with Lyme disease until several years later. "We want to get care."

He said they visited around 30 doctors in New Hampshire before giving up, finally connecting with doctors in Maine and New York for long-term therapy.

Representatives of the New Hampshire Board of Medicine and the New Hampshire Medical Society — which have not taken a position on the effects of long-term antibiotics — said no doctors have been disciplined in New Hampshire for Lyme disease treatment. They said none have called wondering if they would get into trouble for long-term treatment. State epidemiologist Jose Montero also testified against the bill.

"The board sees this as an extremely dangerous precedent. Will the public now expect that through the legislative process, it can compel physicians to practice in a certain way, either to perform or not perform a certain treatment or therapy?" board President Robert Andelman testified.

The argument against long-term treatment received a boost last week in Connecticut. A review board appointed to settle an investigation by Connecticut's attorney general concluded that guidelines established by the Infectious Disease Society of America don't need to be changed.

"There's not one controlled study that shows a benefit of prolonged therapy," said Jeffrey Parsonnet, an infectious disease specialist at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and member of the review panel.

The House passed the bill in February. Connecticut and Rhode Island have passed laws on the same subject. Other states have approved guidelines offering doctors protections.

Daniel Cameron, an internist and epidemiologist in Mount Kisco, N.Y., is the immediate past president of the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society, which supports the bill.

He said at least two doctors have been disciplined — though not in New Hampshire — and others have been questioned by medical boards on their long-term handling of Lyme disease.

“I think you only need a few doctors to be intimidated and nervous about their license,” to create a need for the legislation, he said. “There’s this fear out there that doctors are reluctant to treat past 30 days.”

In New Hampshire, 1,200 cases of Lyme disease were reported in 2009.

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