

Lyme Disease Center opens at Newport Hospital

Unique multidisciplinary center dedicated entirely to treatment of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses

NEWPORT – The Lifespan Lyme Disease Center at Newport Hospital recently opened. The first of its kind in the state, the center unites academic and clinical infectious diseases experts. Complementary therapies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and physical therapy, and nutrition guidance and more is available to those who need it.

“This is a big medical problem and a big challenge, particularly in Rhode Island,” said infectious diseases specialist **TIMOTHY P. FLANIGAN, MD**, medical director of the Center. “Reported cases of Lyme disease in Rhode Island alone rose fourfold over the past six years, and the rise in other tick-borne illnesses, such as babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and anaplasmosis, is almost as steep.”

“Our team of infectious diseases specialists is highly experienced in treating patients with these conditions,” he added, “particularly those coping with Post-treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome, sometimes called chronic Lyme disease. We collaborate with specialists in neurology, rheumatology and other fields to provide integrated, seamless care for patients with acute tick-borne illnesses, especially those who continue to struggle with symptoms after the initial infection has been treated.”

To help patients achieve their own health and wellness goals, a wide range of services is available to them at the Lifespan Lyme Disease Center, including:

- **Diagnosis and testing** – The most current, reputable methods are used to test for and diagnose Lyme disease. Testing is also done for other rare and co-occurring tick-borne illnesses, such as babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and anaplasmosis.
- **Evaluation of symptoms** – The center assesses all chronic symptoms that are difficult to classify and address to rule out the involvement of Lyme disease. However, the center treats tick-borne diseases exclusively.
- **Individual treatment plans** – Customized treatment plans are developed for each patient based on unique needs and goals.
- **Management of symptoms** – As with any chronic condition, some symptoms cannot be eliminated, but their effects can be alleviated, allowing patients to feel and function better. Patients’ progress and reaction to different therapies and treatments is monitored to identify the best course of care.

The center’s multidisciplinary team includes physicians with expertise in infectious diseases and tick-borne illnesses; behavioral, physical and occupational therapists; and specialists in nutrition and other fields. In addition to Dr. Flanigan, the core team includes adult infectious diseases specialist **REBECCA REECE, MD**, pediatrician **JEROME LARKIN, MD**, and behavioral therapist **ANNE DAVIDGE, PhD**. Individual treatment plans, which feature evaluation and collaborative assessment over a period of six to 12 months, include:

- Appropriate antibiotic therapy, which is carefully evaluated;
- Cognitive behavioral therapy to assist with the cognitive and emotional issues some patients experience;
- Physical therapy to build strength and resilience and alleviate muscle and joint pain;
- Nutritional consultation to review a patient’s current diet and educate them about optimal dietary choices; and
- Complementary therapies, including non-traditional approaches such as yoga, acupuncture and more.

The center also uses a comprehensive team approach to Post-treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome, or chronic Lyme disease, and its impact on patients’ health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 10 to 20 percent of patients treated for Lyme disease with a recommended two- to four-week course of antibiotics will have lingering symptoms of fatigue, pain, or joint and muscle aches. In some cases, these can last for more than six months.

“There are newer tick-borne illnesses that we are just starting to discover and all of these can affect patients’ lives – their ability to work and live as they wish,” said Dr. Reece, a lead physician at the Lifespan Lyme Disease Center. “This is a place where patients will be cared for long term. It’s not enough to tell patients that the infection has been treated. We want patients to know that we’re going to work through the lingering effects to help them feel better.”

“This is a wellness model,” added Dr. Flanigan, “and our aim is to help patients build their immune response, their resilience, and quite simply – to feel better and get back to daily living.” ❖