

Research Review Finds IDSA Guidelines Contribute to Mental Health Epidemic



Researchers, including Robert C. Bransfield, MD, Lyme Disease Association Professional & Medical Advisory Board Member, recently reviewed the proposed new Lyme Disease Guidelines, a [100 page document](#) on the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme disease drafted by the Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA) in collaboration with the American Academy of Neurology and American Academy of Rheumatology. The draft of the IDSA Guidelines was released for public comment in August of 2019 and received a considerable number of responses from the Lyme community, many critical of the proposed Guidelines.

[The review](#) was published in *Healthcare Scientific Journal* and scrutinizes specific sections of the guidelines that are most relevant to psychiatry including the disclaimer, laboratory testing, and adult and pediatric psychiatric sections. The researchers have outlined many issues with the IDSA Guideline draft, most notably, the failure to outline the causal association between Lyme disease and psychiatric illnesses throughout, despite the vast amount of well-founded supporting evidence.

The Disclaimer

According to the researchers, the proposed disclaimer, which was more extensive than the one on past IDSA guidelines, contained many issues, including failure to state that the guidelines cannot be used to establish a standard of care. The analysis found that the disclaimer offered no type of warranty of accuracy or reliability with the methods outlined and that the institutions responsible for creating the guidelines held themselves harmless from any potential losses that may occur when practicing physicians use the guidelines to treat patients. The seriousness of the guidelines issue came to the attention of the US Health and Human Services Tick-Borne Disease Working Group (TBDWG), of which LDA President Pat Smith is a member, and discussion was included in the group's 2018 Report to Congress.

Diagnostic Testing

According to the researchers, one of the most central flaws contained within the guidelines was the recommended use of the scientifically unfounded surveillance case definition as diagnostic criteria. The IDSA Guidelines make the incorrect assessment that patients who do not meet the surveillance case definition for Lyme disease do not meet clinical diagnostic criteria either, and therefore, do not have Lyme disease. Additionally, the review calls attention to issues with the IDSA's arbitrary focus on 2-tiered testing as a reliable method of diagnosis.

Testing Adults with Psychiatric Illness for Lyme Disease

The IDSA Guidelines advise against testing for Lyme disease in adults with diagnosed psychiatric illness, yet a number of studies show a causal relationship between Lyme disease and certain kinds of psychiatric illnesses. Prior research has shown that a low prevalence of mental illness may exist prior to infection while the presence of psychiatric illnesses and comorbidities is more significant post-infection.

The researchers were able to identify 377 unique citations on the ILADS website, supporting an association between Lyme disease and psychiatric illness. However, the IDSA Guidelines include only a small number of articles limited to epidemiologic studies that selectively reported outcomes

Testing Children with Developmental, Behavioral, or Psychiatric Disorders for Lyme Disease

The IDSA Guidelines also recommend against standard testing for Lyme disease in children with developmental, behavioral, or psychiatric disorders, referencing that there is no data to support a causal association between tick-borne infections and behavioral disorders or developmental delays in children. However, as the researchers who analyzed the IDSA Guidelines state, the IDSA included no references to support these claims and in fact, numerous articles demonstrating the causal relationship between Lyme disease and developmental, behavioral, and psychiatric disorders in childhood do exist.

References:

1. Bransfield RC, Cook MJ, Bransfield DR. [Proposed Lyme disease guidelines and psychiatric illnesses](#). *Healthcare*. 2019;7(3):105.

2. Rheumatologyadvisor.com. Review Indicates Inclusion of Psychiatric Illness Association in Proposed Lyme Disease Guidelines. [Web Article]. Copyright 2019 Rheumatology Advisor.

<https://www.rheumatologyadvisor.com/home/topics/lyme-disease/review-indicates-inclusion-of-psychiatric-illness-association-in-proposed-lyme-disease-guidelines/>