

**Part 27:**

**Lyme/+ epidemic: corporate profits, real estate values, seasonal tourism**

Why is there such intransigence, decades into this epidemic, to develop deeper scientific understanding of the possibility that the Lyme spirochete can evade simple 2 to 4 weeks of antibiotics, or to take seriously the role of co-infections?

The preceding research has documented the powerful profit-driven interests of the health care industry, HMO's and the pharmaceutical giants to limit treatment and research for these serious infectious diseases.

There are certainly other formidable capitalist profit-making industries that also have a similar stake in minimizing the seriousness of the Lyme/+ epidemic: the real estate and tourism industries.

The economic impact of the Lyme/+ epidemic figured prominently in a New York Times article on Sept. 5, 2009. The article, which focused on Nantucket, Mass., admitted that the epidemic carries other serious diseases besides the Lyme spirochete. The article noted: "Not just the familiar Lyme disease but also Babesiosis and ehrlichiosis, which are less common, can be debilitating or fatal."

Michael Kopko, chair of the Nantucket Board of Selectmen, told the Times: "We recognize that it's a big problem here. Those of us who live here all know someone or are related to someone or have ourselves had a tick-borne disease." The article noted that Kopko's spouse and child also have had tick-borne diseases.

Laura Mueller, a summer resident for 40 years, reportedly "barely survived Babesiosis in 2007."

Babesiosis also lacerated Nantucket summer resident Tom Foley's spleen. He was one of many people who had to be airlifted off the island because of illnesses from tick-borne diseases.

"People are going to die from this," Foley told the New York Times reporter. "People don't want to talk about it—they're worried it will hurt property values—but something has to be done."

Real estate values are not the only economic concern. Seasonal tourism is important to Nantucket's economy.

On Nantucket, for example, "per capita disease rates are inexact because Nantucket's population swings from about 10,000 off-season to about 40,000 in summer and because cases contracted on-island but diagnosed elsewhere are often

not reported here."

The article cited a September 2009 study of about 220 homeowners in the Tom Nevers area of Nantucket, which reported that 61 percent said at least one or more of the members of their household—including guests and renters, have suffered from a tick-borne disease.

Dr. Timothy Lepore, Nantucket's surgeon and tick expert, reported to a town-appointed committee of which he is a member that these tick-borne diseases have caused near fatalities. He emphasized, "We see the top of the iceberg, the people who get sick."

Profits from tourism and property values also came up about another geographic region—Connecticut. Author Michael Carroll wrote about the efforts of Lyme activist and nurse Steve Nostrum to get notice about the seriousness of the epidemic to the public.

Carroll stated, "Nostrum tried unsuccessfully for over a decade to get coverage in local newspapers warning people to take precautions. A reporter once took him aside and told him, 'You want to know, Steve, why you can't get anything published in the area papers Well, off the record, our major advertisers are telling us, 'If you run one more story on Lyme disease and ticks, we're pulling our ads.'"  
("Lab 257," p. 27)

*Next: Profit motive holds back scientific understanding of Lyme/+ epidemic*