

Part 19:
Lack of science appeals to prejudices

Ruling classes have a long history of witch hunts to scapegoat the ill in response to epidemics of infectious disease, rather than to meet the needs of the population. Under feudal rule in what is now Europe, the bubonic plague was blamed on Jewish people charged with poisoning the water wells. During the early AIDS epidemic, gay and bisexual men were demonized for sexuality outside of coupled, monogamous, heterosexual marital relations.

Denial of the seriousness of the Lyme/+ public health crisis is a denial of materialist-based science. Once having run off the paved path of science, medical judgments about people who report illness, pain and disability have nowhere to travel except in the ruts of already deep historical prejudices.

By denying the mass impact of Lyme plus its co-infections, the U.S. scientific establishment issues an open appeal to already existing bigotries to "explain" why so many are so ill.

Without a scientific explanation, doctors too often fall back on pathologizing those who are oppressed based on race/nationality, sex, sexuality and gender expression. This creates more obstacles for those who are oppressed to access health care. People who are ill suffer denial of credibility, unemployment, poverty, lack of health insurance, institutionalized racism, the demand for identification papers, women's oppression and other oppressions based on sexuality, sex and gender.

Those who are oppressed and most impoverished are also most likely to be among the uncounted ill and disabled people who have given up seeking medical answers or treatment, the way so many millions have abandoned their long fruitless search for jobs and have dropped off the unemployment rolls.

Lyme/+ epidemic leaves the most oppressed and impoverished without diagnosis care or treatment. Institutionalized racism results, for example, in medical photographs and descriptions of rashes and other physical signs connected to Lyme documented only on light-skinned people.

Yet the Lyme/+ epidemic affects oppressed peoples--from Native nations on reservations to oppressed peoples living in impoverished rural communities across the North American continent, from Black farmers in Alabama to undocumented Mexican workers in the fields of Orange Valley, from Brazilian immigrant workers in Cape Cod to the chain-ganged prisoner workers in the plantations of Angola State Farm, Louisiana.

Yet there's very little information about this epidemic in oppressed peoples' own

languages. And for undocumented immigrant workers, who face high risk of exposure—from work in the fields to landscaping--bosses don't provide health care. Once the crop is harvested, or the construction is complete, ICE agents sweep in and disperse the workforce.

Women who press for diagnosis are labeled "hysterical." Mothers who back up the credibility of their ill children are actually having their sick children taken from them by the courts.

Dr. Virginia Sherr, MD, stressed, "So many children sick from complex diseases like Lyme have been forcibly removed from mothers who insist the children are ill. The mothers may be vilified, publicly shamed, or even jailed." ("Cure Unknown," pp. 155-156)

One doctor who pathologized my personhood said to me--a transgender, lesbian female who was immuno-suppressed and had lost almost a third of my body weight: "You want to know why you're sick? Look in the mirror!" He suggested counseling with religious imagery.

Those who refute these "diagnoses" that are not deduced from a scientific process find themselves medically labeled as "problem patients," rather than as patients with an as-yet-undetermined medical problem.

Next: Who gets to decide when doctor are divided?