

from Leslie Feinberg August 2011 transgenderwarrior.org
my research notes on the medical politics driving the "Lyme Wars"

Part 24:

'We'll defend our doctors!'

On November 9, 2000, people with Lyme/+, doctors and other health care workers prepared to rally in Manhattan in support of Dr. Burrascano during the State Office of Professional Medical Conduct (OPMC) hearings which began on Oct. 26, 2000.

"The agency has declined to release the exact charges that have been leveled against Dr. Burrascano," the Nov. 9 Southampton Press reported, "but Voices of Lyme has called for him to be cleared of nine charges of misconduct.

"The group has also called for an investigation of OPMC, a division of the State Health Department, for alleged bias in its handling of Dr. Burrascano's case and other cases involving doctors using treatments not recognized by the OPMC."

Ellen Lubarsky, a Nov. 9, 2000 rally organizer, stated, "When ultimately Dr. Burrascano was charged, we knew this could be the end of getting our treatment. He is the most known physician. If he is disciplined in any way ... it will create a climate where it will be impossible for us to get treatment." (The Southampton Press, Nov. 9, 2000)

Lubarsky told the Southampton Press. "It's the defining moment because if we allow this to go through ... the chances that any doctor will risk [hir] license to treat us is very slim." Lubarsky, identified in the Southampton Press as one of the rally organizers, reported that she "had to do most of the planning using a keyboard in bed."

Lovette Mott was one of Burrascano's patients who was not able to attend the rally. Mott emphasized that if Burrascano was stripped of his license, "[Y]ou're going to have a riot in the streets. To the extent that we can, we will not go away. We can't go away--we have no place to go. What are we supposed to do? We're supposed to sit here and die." (York Dispatch, Nov. 9, 2000)

"Mott said Burrascano told her, 'Let's not make this political. Let's see if they are willing to hear the science. If they're not, we'll have to make it political.'" But Mott told the reporter, "It already is political, as far as I'm concerned. He has no hope of keeping his license except through political action." (Southampton Press)

Lovette Mott summed up, "We're up against drug companies and insurance companies and our government that have formed some type of coalition."

On November 9, 2000, people with Lyme/+, doctors and other health care workers rallied in support of Dr. Burrascano.

MisTick offered an overview of how far people traveled--many very ill and in a lot of pain--to take part in the rally. Rally participants came from California; Michigan; Florida; "a whole busload from the D.C. area," Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New England, New York, "and more." Individuals forming a large contingent traveled from Mashpee, Mass. (avonhistory.org)

MisTick noted that after several speakers, "[T]he Maryland/Virginia/Washington D.C. bus people, who had chanted and cheered the whole way up, *could* not be contained any longer, and started up behind their large green banner, coming to the forefront of the crowd with matching caps and chanting 'O-P-M-C, stop harassing Dr. B.!!!'

Doctors and other health scientists issued support statements on Nov. 9, the day of the rally, including a petition signed by physicians from across the U.S. and from Switzerland and Germany, to deliver to state officials.

The ILADS statement read in part: "We believe that the proceedings against Dr. Burrascano represent a bias which favors insurance companies and special interest groups, and are contrary to the basic scientific principles of medicine." (full text: angelfire.com)

Another petition, signed by 85 health scientists, read in part: "[W]e formally oppose rigid diagnostic and treatment guidelines, commonly referred to as 'cookbook medicine,' being currently applied to the complex, myriad presentations and varying bacterial strains of these vector-borne illnesses.

"We maintain that such guidelines are biased, and designed to suit the economic interests of the insurance industry while depriving patients of timely and effective care and enhanced quality of life." (full text: angelfire.com)

Pat Smith, then-president of Lyme Disease Association of New Jersey (LDA), stressed to those gathered at the Nov. 9 rally: "Today marks a turning point in the war against our doctors."

Casewatch.org--an online guide to health-related legal matters--summed up the legal results in Burrascano's case: "In 2002, New York State's Administrative Review Board for Professional Medical Conduct concluded that Joseph Burrascano, M.D., had committed professional misconduct by negligently treating two patients. The review board ordered Burrascano to serve two years of probation during which his practice would be monitored by another physician acceptable to the Office of Professional Medical Conduct (OPMC).

"Burrascano, who practices in East Hampton, New York, specializes in treating Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Some of his diagnostic and treatment approaches (including long-term antibiotic administration to treat Lyme disease) do not conform to widely accepted medical guidelines. However, the licensing authorities did not order him to stop using them. ...

"The outcome of the case may have been influenced by like-minded physicians and hundreds of patients who rallied to his support." (casewatch.org)

Next: 'Growing army of patients and support groups'