

# News

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## \*\*\*\*UT Southwestern opens Lyme disease treatment clinic

DALLAS--The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas has opened a Lyme disease treatment clinic where physicians can refer patients suspected of having Lyme disease, as well as those already diagnosed. Initially the clinic will be open two days each month.

"We're setting up this clinic for physicians who want advice on management of the disease or who would rather send their patients here for treatment and further, hopefully more definitive, diagnostic tests," said Dr. Justin Radolf, assistant professor of internal medicine and microbiology at UT Southwestern. Dr. Radolf, a researcher of Lyme disease and other Spirochete infections, will head the new clinic.

With early diagnosis and medical intervention, such as antibiotics, Radolf said most patients can avoid the chronic complications of Lyme disease, a tick-borne infection that has been reported in nearly every state.

Radolf said misdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis of Lyme disease are common for several reasons. Serologic tests are not always able to detect the presence of the Lyme antibodies early because the antibody response to the bacterium that causes it develops slowly. The

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bacterium is also difficult to culture in tissue samples and blood of infected individuals, the researcher said. And physicians outside areas where Lyme disease is prevalent are less likely to recognize its diverse symptoms.

"One of the difficulties with Lyme disease diagnosis is that the bacterium that causes it, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, may not generate a strong antibody response early in the course of the disease, making false negative tests possible, Radolf explained. Alternatively, false positives also frequently occur with current diagnostic tests. One of our goals is to develop improved serodiagnostic tests to determine with a greater degree of certainty whether an individual actually does have the disease."

Only 22 percent of the cases reported to the Texas Department of Public Health last year actually were confirmed as Lyme disease, he pointed out.

According to reports, Lyme clinics in northeastern states frequently end up determining that people have some inflammatory or non-inflammatory rheumatologic problem unrelated to Lyme disease.

Besides offering a much needed patient service, the clinic will provide Radolf and his colleagues with a clinical base for continued laboratory research into the pathology of the disease. In April, Radolf and his collaborator Dr. Michael Norgard, associate professor of microbiology at UT Southwestern, were awarded a \$760,000 five-year NIH grant to study Lyme disease.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.