

Contact: Melissa Chefec, MCPR Public Relations, 203-968-6625

For Immediate Release

**THE “OTHER SIDE” OF LYME DISEASE:  
*Understanding — and overcoming — Lyme’s psychological symptoms***

**Greenwich, CT, October 2007** – By now, everybody’s heard of Lyme disease — with approximately 20,000 new cases reported each year, it’s the most common vector-borne disease in the United States. We’ve heard about the tell-tale “bull’s eye” rash that often develops at the site of a bite from an infected tick, and probably know about the more common symptoms of a Lyme infection, including fever, aching joints, fatigue and headaches.

But what most people don’t know is that an advanced case of Lyme disease can cause psychological and cognitive problems, as well, says Diane Blanchard, co-president and co-founder of Time for Lyme, Inc., a research, education and advocacy group, which along with the Lyme Disease Association, recently endowed the first Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases Research Center at Columbia University Medical in NYC dedicated to the study of chronic Lyme disease. These symptoms can include intense mood swings, irritability, depression and anxiety, memory loss, slowed cognitive processing, diminished concentration, problems with reading and speaking, spatial disorientation, and cognitive discontinuity (losing track of a conversation or train of thought). Complicating matters further, the symptoms can be intermittent and vary from day to day.

“Patients with advanced Lyme disease can also have problems multi-tasking,” Blanchard says. “They say they’ve got ‘brain fog,’ which keeps them from thinking and speaking clearly.” Some patients also report a kind of cognitive “short-circuiting” that makes them feel confused, lose focus, stutter, or panic.

Unfortunately, patients often don’t understand the root of these symptoms, says Mindy Beth Lipson, Psy.D., a psychologist in New Rochelle, NY and recently appointed Time For Lyme Advisory Board member, who frequently works with Lyme disease patients and leads Time for Lyme’s patient support group (sponsored by Time for Lyme, Greenwich Hospital and the Greenwich Department of Health). To make things worse, many doctors don’t understand them, either. “Lyme disease is a multi-system illness,” she explains. “The bacteria that cause Lyme have been found in all areas of the human body, including the brain.” Lyme disease is similar to Syphilis, which was also dubbed “The Great Imitator” because it has the same properties — and the same ability to mimic a multitude of illnesses. “If a Lyme infection is left uncontrolled, it can do a great deal of damage,” Dr. Lipson says. “Unfortunately, the damage is often mistaken for that caused by other disease processes.”

Psychological and cognitive problems often develop a year or more after infection, and are much more problematic in people whose Lyme disease wasn’t treated adequately — or treated at all — at its onset. Although Lyme disease responds well when diagnosed and treated early, patients don’t always see the tick (or the rash), and doctors can sometimes miss a diagnosis, as well. These patients are at risk of developing a chronic form of Lyme disease, which can bring with it a host of psychological, cognitive and other problems. And right now, there is no consensus in the medical community as to how best to treat patients with the later stages of the disease.

**The Psychological Toll**

Patients suffering from the psychological and cognitive symptoms of advanced Lyme disease (also known as late neuropsychiatric Lyme disease) are also facing a slew of other problems, Dr. Lipson says. The stress can create or exacerbate an inability to work, and financial, marital or relationship problems can develop, as can frequent feelings of isolation and fears about the future. All of this can contribute to depression and anxiety.

Dr. Lipson notes that, for depression and anxiety, antidepressant medications can be helpful, as can learning coping strategies and effective communication skills to help deal with family, friends, and medical providers. She also recommends seeking out a specialist trained in medical or health psychology, such as a medical or health psychologist, ideally someone who's treated other patients with Lyme disease.

Another big help: Joining a Lyme disease support group, such as the one Dr. Lipson leads for Time for Lyme, which is co-sponsored by the Greenwich Dept. of Health and Greenwich Hospital (The support group meets at the Greenwich Town Hall the first Thursday of each month. Meetings run from 7-8:30 PM. You can find more info on the support group on their website at <http://www.timeforlyme.org>.)

"Support groups can be an invaluable tool for people struggling with Lyme disease — particularly late-stage Lyme disease," says Caroline Calderone Baisley, Director of Health off the Department of Health in Greenwich. "Support groups for Lyme disease patients or those who think they may have Lyme are a wonderful resource since they offer people afflicted with this disease an opportunity to speak about their experiences. So often people don't know what is happening to them and by talking about it with others they are comforted. As a person who suffered and continues to feel the ill effects of late -stage Lyme, support groups, like Time for Lyme's group, have helped many people understand and cope with this disease. This is great community service and I hope that those with Lyme disease take advantage of it", adds Baisley.

#### **About Time for Lyme**

Time For Lyme is an organization dedicated to eliminating the devastating effects of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illness. Our mission is to prevent the spread of disease, develop definitive diagnostic tools and effective treatments, and to ultimately find a cure for tick-borne illness by supporting research, education, and the acquisition and dissemination of information. In addition, we will continue to act as advocates for Lyme disease sufferers and their families through support of legislative reform on the federal, state and local levels. For more information on our organization, please visit [www.timeforlyme.org](http://www.timeforlyme.org).

#### **About Mindy Beth Lipson, Psy.D.**

Dr. Lipson was trained in the San Francisco bay area with a doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Wright Institute at Berkeley. She completed her pre-doctoral internship at Jacobi Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine and completed her post-doctoral fellowship in conjunction with the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia (CASA) and Palladia, Inc. in New York. She has worked in the clinical/health fields for over ten years in extremely diverse areas such as medical/health, trauma, chronic mental illness, addiction, grief, stress, domestic violence, sexual offenses, relationship issues, child, adolescent and adult development and self actualization.

Dr. Lipson's training has provided her with excellent opportunities to provide traditional, eclectic approaches as well as, newer, more innovative and holistic healing techniques. She is interested in the emotional effects of tick-borne diseases and is currently working on research which she plans to publish in a book discussing this fascinating, cutting edge topic. Dr. Lipson utilizes imagery/visualization, biofeedback, and spiritual practice to increase the healing/curative response. Dr. Lipson works with many holistic, diverse health professionals in the greater United States to provide excellent services to those she serves. She is adept and intuitive in helping those she serves to find their way to healing when faced with difficult medical conditions or challenging life circumstances.

Dr. Lipson is also a Lyme Literate Psychologist, writer and activist and is available to train your hospital, school or agency about tick-borne diseases. She has offices in New Rochelle, New York and works with inner city youth in the Bronx and Yonkers. She can be reached at her office at 914-738-2358 or contacted through her website at [www.docmindybeth.com](http://www.docmindybeth.com).

