Resource Column

Web Sites that Address Postpartum Depression

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Abstract

This column reviews four Web sites that address postpartum depression.

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Postpartum depression is a serious medical condition experienced by women soon after giving birth. Up to 75% of new mothers experience the condition's mildest form, "baby blues," which may result from the rapid hormonal shifts that occur during the postpartum period. These postpartum blues typically begin a few days after the baby's birth and generally resolve within two weeks. Tearfulness and depressed mood are common features and are usually self-limiting. Women with "baby blues" often report feeling overwhelmed, anxious, irritable, and sensitive.

A more serious form of the disorder is referred to as *postpartum depression*. Postpartum depression is a significantly more severe depressed mood than "baby blues" and often lasts much longer. It affects approximately 10% of postpartum women and is characterized by sadness, frequent crying, insomnia, appetite change, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, feelings of inadequacy, and lack of interest in normal activities. Postpartum depression most often occurs around the fourth week after giving birth, just prior to resumption of menses, and after weaning; however, it may occur anytime during the first postpartum year. Risk factors for postpartum depression include first birth, ambivalence about the pregnancy, lack of social support, lack of a

partner, and a history of postpartum depression or another depressive illness.

The third and most severe form of postpartum depression is called *postpartum psychosis*. Insomnia, agitation, mood changes, confusion, poor judgment, and difficulty in concentrating characterize postpartum psychosis. The incidence rate is 1–2 per 1,000. In especially severe forms, the woman may develop delusion and hallucinations. About 10% of women with postpartum psychosis will ultimately commit suicide or infanticide related to their delusions. For example, the woman may throw the baby carrier into the lake because she thought it contained snakes. Risk factors are similar to postpartum depression and include an obsessive personality, family history of mood disorder, and previous psychosis. Symptoms are usually evident within the first three months postpartum. With prompt treatment, the rate of recovery for the mother is good. Treatments may include hospitalization, antipsychotics, sedatives, social support, and psychotherapy.

Beck (2002), a leading nurse researcher on postpartum depression, conducted a metasynthesis of women's experiences with postpartum depression. She found that four overarching themes emerged: an incongruent perception between expectations and the reality of new motherhood, a sense of spiraling downward, a feeling of pervasive loss, and a feeling of achieving gains.

The Web sites presented in this column represent the best resources currently available for childbirth educators and other health care providers who care for pregnant and postpartum women. The last page conveniently outlines these sites and may be copied for distribution. Additional Web sites from last issue's Resource Column, which discussed information currently available for working mothers (Montgomery, 2002), are also included on the last page.

Depression after Delivery, Inc.

- www.depressionafterdelivery.com

Depression after Delivery, Inc. is a professional organization to support women suffering from postpartum depression. This Web site's purpose is to promote awareness of postpartum depression. It provides in-depth information on symptoms, typical treatments, and the different levels of depression (baby blues, postpartum depression, and postpartum psychosis). One highlight is

the inclusion of professional referral lists, volunteer phone contacts, and support groups through the organization and the Web site. The site is easy to navigate, the language is clear, and the information has been updated within the last year. This Web site is an excellent resource for consumers or professionals.

Kids Health—Postpartum Depression and Caring for Your Baby

- www.kidshealth.org/parent/pregnancy_newborn/home/ppd_baby.html

This Web site provides basic education about postpartum depression. The information flows through seven pages of content about symptoms, risk factors, diagnosis, and treatment. Different levels of treatment from health care providers are also addressed. One unique feature of this site offers a discussion on how postpartum depression affects the newborn and how the mother should react to and treat the baby. The site also devotes one page to how the new mother can nurture herself and describes the benefits of using these techniques to overcome the disease. The Kids Health Web network is sponsored by the Nemours Foundation, an organization that provides funding for several children's hospitals. The site is simple to navigate and offers links to other related information.

Postpartum Education for Parents

- www.sbpep.org/index.htm

Postpartum Education for Parents (PEP) is a volunteer organization operated by parents. Its Web site provides basic information on the symptoms of postpartum depression. The group is based in Santa Barbara, CA, where PEP offers group meetings for postpartum depression sufferers. One impressive aspect of this Web site is the network it creates with other helpful resources that address the disorder. In conjunction with Postpartum Support International (www.postpartum.net), PEP provides a postpartum depression support contact in every state and in several countries around the world. The site offers an extensive list of suggested readings, along with links to other Web sites. Volunteers update the site three to four times a year. It is easy to navigate and the language is simple.

The Postpartum Stress Center

- www.postpartumstress.com

A team of health professionals at a Pennsylvania clinic developed this Web site. It is an excellent resource because it offers perspectives not addressed by other sites. One subpage is dedicated to educating husbands and family members about the types of support to offer the new mother who is battling postpartum depression. The site provides helpful suggestions on what to say to the new mother. It also features a wallet-sized, printable card that outlines information about postpartum depression. The card can be distributed among friends and family to help them better understand what the new mother is going through. The Web site also offers a page that provides information on risk assessment that can be used during pregnancy. This is especially useful for prenatal educators and others who provide health care for expectant mothers. Identifying susceptible pregnant women can allow for ample time to help prevent or treat the development of postpartum depression. For women who feel they might have postpartum depression, the site provides the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale.

Professionals at the Postpartum Stress Center provide expectant mothers with practical advice on how to feel better and who to ask for help. The site addresses health care providers and the broader community (e.g., a member of the religious community). One highlight of the Web site is the section on what the pregnant woman should ask health care providers and what she should be sure to tell them. In turn, this site also provides professionals with information on what to ask expectant mothers and how to assess for postpartum depression. The site is easy to navigate, has been updated recently, and provides comprehensive and straightforward facts. For more information, postpartum depression sufferers are encouraged to email the founder of the clinic, who is also a social worker.

References

- Beck, C. T. (2002). Postpartum depression: A metasynthesis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 453–472.
- Montgomery, K. S. (2002). Resource column: Information for working mothers. *Journal of Perinatal Education*, 11(2), 44–45.

Internet Resources for Postpartum Depression

Depression after Delivery, Inc.

- www.depressionafterdelivery.com

Kids Health—Postpartum Depression and Caring for Your Baby

- www.kidshealth.org/parent/pregnancy_newborn/home/ppd_baby.html

Postpartum Education for Parents

- www.sbpep.org/index.htm

The Postpartum Stress Center

www.postpartumstress.com

Internet Resources for Working Mothers

Home-Based Working Moms

- www.hbwm.com

Labor Project for Working Families

- <http://violet.berkeley.edu/~iir/workfam/home.html>

Working Mom Mall

- www.WorkingMomMall.com

Working Mom's Refuge

- www.momsrefuge.com/index.html

Working Mother Magazine

- www.workingmother.com

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