

Linking Moms to Combat Post-Partum Depression

BY MEGHAN OCKEY AND ANDREA MENDIZABAL

Bringing a new life into the world can be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling life experiences. One challenge that too many new moms and their families face is the debilitating condition known as post-partum depression. Post-partum depression affects up to 10 per cent of new mothers (according to the Canadian Psychological Association, 2015), which impacts not only mothers but families as well.

MOMS Link™, a program developed by Nicole Letourneau, a professor at the University of Calgary's faculty of nursing, is helping moms in an effort to combat the effects of post-partum depression.

Mothers with post-partum depression not only experience low mood, but are also less able to look after themselves or their baby, which has the potential to negatively impact the child's development.

"It's not only problematic for the mother, it's problematic for their children who end up with cognitive and language delays, problems with peer relationships, and struggles in school," says Letourneau professor and Palix/ACHF chair in parent-infant mental health, faculty of nursing, University of Calgary.

Letourneau, a PhD prepared nurse and member of the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, developed MOMS Link™ after studying the long-term effects of post-partum depression.

"One of the consequences is that it affects the child, not because of the symptoms per se, but because of how moms interact with their child. Moms are less sensitive and responsive; they don't have the necessary serve-and-return interactions with their child. We believe that's the reason why the child's development is affected," says Letourneau.

As the name suggests, MOMS Link™ joins moms together in a support network aimed at combating post-partum depression.

"I worked with a colleague, Cindy-Lee Dennis, professor and Canada Research Chair in Perinatal Community Health, who had developed a program to prevent depression in moms. Together we adapted it to treat symptoms of depression;

not just prevent depression," says Letourneau. "We made it available to every mom in the province (the program was first developed and deployed in New Brunswick) who had access to a phone and was depressed."

Post-partum depression is similar to other types of depression – the sufferer is likely to isolate and not ask for help. Coupled with already exhausting care of a newborn, it is especially difficult on a new mother.

"We initially worked with New Brunswick's non-urgent health-care call centre (Tele-Care 811) to screen mothers. Anyone who called with a child under the age of two could be screened," says Letourneau. "If they screened high on our measures, they were eligible for the program. We provided eligible mothers with a peer mentor who had overcome post-partum depression and would speak to the mom for one hour a week for 12 weeks. At the end of the program 89 per cent of the mothers were no longer depressed."

Success of the program thus far is in large part due to a partnership the MOMS Link™ program developed with Sykes Assistance Services, the provider of New Brunswick's Tele-Care 811 program.

Sykes Assistance Services is now positioned to deliver MOMS Link™ to health regions across Canada – and are looking for partner communities with which to deliver the program.

When the consequences of post-partum depression can be so grave, it is essential that families suffering the effects receive the help they require. With MOMS Link™, women can receive this help in their own home without the added stress of finding help elsewhere. It has proven successful in New Brunswick, and has the potential to help many more families across Canada.

To learn more about MOMS Link™ and how to bring it to your community, contact Jim Murphy, vice president, healthcare strategy and business development, Sykes Assistance Services, 1-866-522-6148 or info.health@sykes.com.

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