



Harris County Hospital District

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NEWS RELEASE

Meet Antepartum Depression, Postpartum's Less-Famous Cousin

HOUSTON (Oct. 1, 2007) – What is antepartum depression, the lesser-known cousin of postpartum depression? Antepartum depression is a mood disorder caused by chemical imbalances in the brain during pregnancy. External factors, like emotional stress, can also trigger the condition.

Approximately 10-20 percent of all pregnant women experience depression during pregnancy, but few ever speak about it.

“There’s a societal expectation to be happy when you’re pregnant or when you have a baby, so if a woman is sad or depressed she may be hesitant about letting others know,” said Dr. Rhoda Sepowitz, a fourth-year resident who works with patients at the Psychiatric/Obstetrics Clinic at Ben Taub General Hospital. The program operates within Ben Taub’s Obstetrics/Gynecology clinic, which is under the direction of Dr. Harold Miller, chief of obstetrics and gynecology.

Antepartum depression is often overlooked, primarily because expectant mothers and family members disregard the signs as “mood swings” commonly associated with pregnancy. There are also myths that prevent patients from discussing mood disorders with their physicians – like pregnancy somehow “protects” women from mental illness, or that women only experience depression after the baby is born.

While moodiness is common during pregnancy, symptoms of antepartum depression also include a prolonged decrease in energy and concentration, persistent feelings of sadness, and loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities. Other signs include feelings of guilt or worthlessness; anxiety; difficulty concentrating; difficulty sleeping; and thoughts of suicide or death.

Women with antepartum depression are less likely to heed their physician’s advice and follow nutritional guidelines. They are also more likely to smoke, drink, or abuse other substances, which can lead to premature labor, low baby birth weight, and even suicide. Those who experience depression during their pregnancy are also at higher risk for postpartum depression. If you experience signs of depression for longer than two weeks, you should consult your physician immediately.

“It’s common for doctors and expectant mothers to focus on the physical aspect of prenatal health care, but it’s equally important to assess patients’ emotional state,” said Dr. Britta Ostermeyer, who oversees the program. “Patients should also take it upon themselves to get informed and talk to their doctor if their mood is glum and doesn’t change.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation’s third most-populous county. It provides more than one million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, and an extensive network of community-based clinics, health centers, and mobile health units.

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