



pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2022

Department of Human Services Highlights Partnership with Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to Enhance Maternal Health Services

Hershey, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) continues its focus on improving maternal health by today joining Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to highlight its work to improve services for perinatal depression and provide greater equity in perinatal care by enhancing provider and staff education.

Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center is one of 16 hospitals participating in the enhanced screening process using the framework established by Pennsylvania's Perinatal Quality Collaborative (PQC), a partnership led by DHS and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, focused on improving identification and care for patients experiencing perinatal depression during or after pregnancy.

"Improving maternal health care practices has been a priority for DHS for the past several years. Pennsylvania's health care systems and providers have been important partners and advocates in working to improve care for moms, parents, babies, and families," said Acting Secretary Meg Snead. "DHS is proud to work closely with Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to develop and implement better perinatal depression screening, follow-up, and treatment practices and to make these a foundational part of prenatal and postpartum care."

According to a [2018 study](#) published by the National Institute of Health, despite how common perinatal depression is, 80 percent of women who experience symptoms of depression and anxiety during a pregnancy or postpartum do not report these feelings to a health care provider. Disparities in rates of perinatal depression are similar to those of other health disparities, with lower income women and women of color reporting a higher prevalence of depression during and after pregnancy. Left untreated, perinatal depression can seriously impact daily and long-term health and wellbeing for mothers, can influence child development, and can lead to major depressive disorder and, potentially, death.

From 2018-2020, DHS, in partnership with the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, participated in the Center for Law and Social Policy's multi-state Moving on Maternal Depression (MOMD) initiative. The goal of this work was to bring together policy makers and non-profits to share experiences and form best practices to identify and increase use of treatment for perinatal depression, understand potential gaps and disparities, and, ultimately, establish a recommended framework to better support parents and children affected by perinatal depression.

Penn State Health uses a multi-disciplinary approach across several specialties, including obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, psychiatry, and family and community medicine for screening, identifying and treating patients with postpartum and perinatal depression. Also, it has They have also developed provider and staff education on maternal mental health and postpartum depression, which increased providers' knowledge and ability to identify perinatal depression and, in turn, enhance treatment.

"Our multidisciplinary approach to the Moving on Maternal Depression initiative reflects our commitment to the total health of our patients and their families, including physical, mental, and emotional health," said Dr. Amy Cruz, an obstetrician/gynecologist and co-lead of the MOMD program at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. "We are actively working to enhance knowledge and management of perinatal depression and close the gaps on related racial and ethnic disparities."

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on maternal mortality show that rates rose between 2019 and 2020, and that Black women are almost three times as likely as white women to die after giving birth. Since taking office, Governor Tom Wolf has prioritized expanding access to health care and supportive services that helps parents be supported through pregnancy and the postpartum period and gives children a strong, healthy start that can lead to continued health, well-being, and positive outcomes throughout their lives.

The Wolf Administration [announced last summer](#) that Pennsylvania will opt-in to extended postpartum coverage for birthing parents covered through Medicaid due to their pregnancy when it becomes available on April 1, 2022. Under the American Rescue Plan Act, states can extend the Medicaid postpartum coverage period from just 60 days to one year after giving birth.

Expanding postpartum coverage for mothers covered through Medicaid will provide continuity and access to health care through a critical period in the mother's life and a foundational time for the health and well-being of their children. The postpartum expansion will be available to states to take effect in April. Individuals are not currently being disenrolled from Medicaid due to the federal public health emergency declaration. DHS will formally submit a State Plan Amendment to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to expand the postpartum coverage period effective April 1, 2022.

To learn more DHS' programs and apply for Medical Assistance and other assistance programs in Pennsylvania, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.

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