

1 May 2018

MORE THAN 1 IN 10 NEW MUMS SUFFER DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY: PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT CALLS FOR INCREASED AWARENESS ON WORLD MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Professor Marie-Paule Austin, head of Perinatal Mental Health at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women – and lead architect of the Federal Government's new perinatal mental health guidelines – has highlighted the prevalence of mental illness in pregnant women and new mums, in a bid to improve diagnosis and outcomes for women and their children.

Professor Austin said [World Maternal Mental Health Day](#), 2 May 2018, was a reminder that perinatal mental health – around 12 weeks before birth and a month after – was crucial to the long-term health and wellbeing of families worldwide.

“Assessment and care of a woman's mental health during pregnancy and in the early months following birth, is just as important as other antenatal and postnatal check-ups – in fact, in the most serious cases, lives depend on it,” Professor Austin said.

The Federal Government released new national clinical guidelines in October 2017, to ensure Australian doctors were equipped to care for the mental health of women in the perinatal period. These guidelines include a range of assessment and treatment tools, including use of the Antenatal Risk Questionnaire (ANRQ) developed by Prof Austin and used at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women for many years.

“Women are incredibly vulnerable to depression before and after having a baby,” said Prof Austin, a professor in the School of Psychiatry at the University of NSW, who has published over 100 peer-reviewed articles on perinatal mood disorders and stress in pregnancy.

“Screening a woman's psychiatric wellbeing during this time is essential because over 10 per cent of Australian women will develop a depressive or anxiety disorder in pregnancy and the first year after birth, often affecting their intimate relationship, parenting confidence and bonding with their baby.”

Professor Austin said studies worldwide had confirmed that assessment and treatment, when required, of a mother's mental health, had been found to ensure:

- better pregnancy outcomes
- better adjustment to the parenting role
- better development of secure infant attachment
- better offspring outcomes in terms of emotional, behavioural and cognitive measures.

Ms Vanessa Madunic, General Manager, Royal Hospital for Women, said as NSW's only women's hospital, also specialising in the care of newborns, The Royal had ensured best practice in perinatal mental health care for many years.

“World Maternal Mental Health Day is an important opportunity to remind the community about how looking after mothers, benefits children, families and the whole community,” Ms Madunic said.

Organisations from around the world have joined forces to raise awareness about maternal mental health through a collective social media push and in-country events. For more on World Maternal Health Day visit: <http://wmmhday.postpartum.net/>

**To speak with Professor Austin, please contact Jennifer Connell,
SESLHD Media Unit, on: 02 9382 4583 or 0418 205 992.**