

Unique NWH Initiative Addresses Postpartum Depression

It is not easy to admit that you are suffering from postpartum depression. New mothers are encouraged to believe that, aside from a predictable loss of sleep, they should feel happy. But approximately ten percent of women who give birth experience postpartum depression, often with severe anxiety, which often is kept private and remains hidden.

A NEW PROGRAM IS DESIGNED to change that. As part of the highly regarded Newton-Wellesley Collaborative for Healthy Families & Communities, the Maternity Services Council set out to identify anyone who is either at risk for postpartum depression or has symptoms. Obstetricians affiliated with Newton-Wellesley ask their patients to complete the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale at three points in time: the 24-week prenatal appointment, the six-week postpartum visit and six months after the baby is born. Factors that contribute to the condition include the sudden drop in hormones after giving birth, a past history of depression and stress or lack of support at home.

“We’ve advanced in our understanding of postpartum depression and anxiety, and we know the Edinburgh scale is an effective tool in identifying it,” explains Buffy Sheff Ross, MSW, LICSW, the clinical social worker who follows up with women who are candidates for treatment. “That includes the woman who describes not feeling a connection with her baby, as well as someone who has thoughts of suicide.

“A new mother who feels ashamed of the way they are feeling might have a difficult time asking for help. I’ve been referred to women who had their baby eight months earlier. If postpartum depression is not recognized and treated, the mother may not be able to smile at or interact with her child. This has an impact on the child’s development.”

Generous funding led to a unique initiative

The Marriott Daughters Foundation provided the generous funding that led to the program’s launch in spring 2019, when Ms. Sheff Ross was recruited and began receiving referrals from NWH obstetricians. Since then, she has counseled close to 300 women.



Julie Marriott, a trustee of both the Marriott Daughters Foundation and the J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, was an early, enthusiastic supporter of the Collaborative for Healthy Families & Communities. “When I was raising my four

daughters, I got involved with their schools in Wellesley, and I met so many incredible, capable people," she explains. "As I became involved with Newton-Wellesley, I knew that the hospital could benefit from the input and expertise of community members and partners."

The initial concept for the Collaborative for Healthy Families & Communities was inspired by Newton-Wellesley's respected child and adolescent psychiatry services. This led to the formation of the Resilience Project Council, which set the goal of strengthening, expanding and increasing access to mental health care at NWH for children and their families. There are now eight different councils (see below).

"Mike Jellinek agreed to return to Newton-Wellesley to organize and service as medical director of the

Collaborative for Healthy Families & Communities

There are now eight councils comprised of community residents and organizations, as well as Newton-Wellesley staff, that address important community needs:

- **Cardiovascular Council**
- **Domestic and Sexual Violence Council**
- **Elder Care Council**
- **Maternity Services Council**
- **Palliative Care Council**
- **Resilience Project Council**
- **Substance Use Council**
- **Workforce Development Council**



The Newton-Wellesley Collaborative for
**Healthy Families
and Communities**

"I believe the postpartum depression initiative is a unique model. It's an example of what a community hospital can accomplish when it is nimble and willing to get out in the community and come up with solutions."

- Julie Marriott

collaborative," notes Ms. Marriott, referring to Michael Jellinek, MD, former president of NWH. "He was the key, because he pulled in terrific medical experts from within the Partners HealthCare system and outside of it." Lauren Lele serves as director of the collaborative, as well as community benefits at Newton-Wellesley.

The Maternity Services Council soon formed, and key individuals saw the value in developing a program that identifies and helps women with postpartum depression. The pediatrician's office is another location where new mothers can be screened. Jessica Werner, a behavioral health coach, is carrying out that work as the 2019 Gardner Scholar. Support for Ms. Werner's work is provided by the Elizabeth Ballantine Gardner, PhD, Scholar Fund.

Approximately 4,000 babies are born at NWH each year. "This isn't just a good idea," says Ms. Marriott, whose daughter, Alice Hales, is a council member. "It's a critical component of good health."

Therapy sessions provide welcome relief

For some women, giving birth for the first time presents an emotional challenge. Sarah knew something was wrong during the early weeks last fall, after her daughter, Francesca, was born. "I was crying a lot," recalls the Dedham resident and middle school teacher. "Caring for a newborn seemed like an endless routine. I was housebound, and I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel."

At her six-week follow-up visit, Elizabeth Konig, MD, her NWH obstetrician, asked Sarah to complete the

Edinburgh scale. Ms. Sheff Ross was soon in touch and suggested regular therapy sessions. “I became comfortable with her pretty quickly,” Sarah says. “I was getting support from my husband and family, but I needed to talk with someone—a professional—who could validate what I was experiencing. It helped me.”

Ms. Sheff Ross notes that a combination of talk therapy and antidepressant medication is known to be the most effective approach. “The medication is safe, but some women prefer not to take it,” she says. She applauds the hospital’s department of obstetrics

and gynecology and its chair, Thomas Beatty, MD, for their commitment to the initiative. “I believe it’s a unique model, where a social worker is specifically committed to helping women with postpartum depression. The obstetricians and others on the interdisciplinary team are very collaborative.”

The postpartum depression initiative demonstrates the impact the Collaborative for Healthy Families & Communities is having, says Ms. Marriott. “It’s an example of what a community hospital can accomplish when it is nimble and willing to get out in the community and come up with solutions.”

Julie Marriott Understood What NWH’s Collaborative Could Achieve

WHEN THE COLLABORATIVE for Healthy Families & Communities was envisioned in 2017, a handful of individuals understood its potential to harness the expertise and energy of community members. Their goal was to expand the impact of Newton-Wellesley in addressing unmet health and wellness needs. Julie Marriott was one of those who saw the potential.

As a member of the hospital’s Board of Trustees, she was impressed to see how the first councils took shape. “Mike Jellinek invited medical experts to get involved, while trustees and others identified community members who had personal interest in the various areas,” Ms. Marriott explains. “As a result, today the collaborative consists of eight councils—all vibrant, interactive and doing great work to ensure that we address our community’s needs.”

The collaborative is fueled by support from two foundations that her family established. “The Marriott Daughters Foundation took a specific interest in the Maternity Services Council, which is focused on screening women for postpartum depression. Trustees of the J. Willard and Alice S.

Marriott Foundation also decided to support the impressive work that council is doing.”

Ms. Marriott was especially enthusiastic about the most recent initiative, the Workforce Development Council, which built on a successful job fair held at Newton-Wellesley in 2018. “The hospital invited local high school students, and more than 50 attended,” she recalls. “Newton-Wellesley physicians, nurses, lab techs—so many staff—were there to tell the students about potential education and jobs in the health care field.”

When the Workforce Development Council was launched in 2019, The Marriott Daughters Foundation provided key support, which led to the first summer internship program: 14 students who came to Newton-Wellesley for paid jobs in a range of areas. “This particular council resonated with me, as I grew up with the philosophy that lives change when people find meaningful jobs,” Ms. Marriott notes.

“I have met some incredible people through my involvement at Newton-Wellesley and my work with the collaborative,” she adds. “As more people become involved, in whatever way they can, they will see that lives are being improved all around us.”



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