



Media Release

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For immediate release

Improving Pregnancy Outcomes for Women with Serious Mental Illness

A joint research project by the Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry (CCRN), Curtin University and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research hopes to improve health outcomes for pregnant women with serious mental illness and their babies. Project manager, Dr. Yvonne Hauck, said women with serious mental illness were at greater risk of developing pregnancy complications and giving birth to babies with medical problems. “Women with serious mental illness have an increased risk of bleeding during pregnancy, cord complications, foetal distress and low birth weight babies,” she said.

Project Chief Investigator Dr Daniel Rock, from CCRN, said the project is one of several being undertaken by the Centre. “This project aims to reduce the risk of poorer health outcomes in persons with a serious mental illness, when compared with the general population.”

Dr Hauck’s team has developed an antenatal care package for women with serious mental illness. The package is comprised of Clinical Guidelines for the health professionals who treat these women, including community mental health nurses, social workers and occupational therapists. “Research has shown that women with serious mental illness do not always seek out the antenatal care they need,” Dr. Hauck said. “While these women usually continue to utilize mental health services, they may not attend antenatal clinics. The Clinical Guidelines we’ve formulated will assist health professionals, especially community mental health clinicians, in ensuring their pregnant clients have access to the best possible antenatal care.”

The antenatal care package was developed in conjunction with community mental health clinicians, midwives, obstetricians, psychiatrists and GPs. The guidelines focus on early and ongoing attendance at antenatal care services, smoking moderation, nutritional advice and linking clients to appropriate support services at the earliest opportunity. The Clinical Guidelines include three key elements - providing reproductive choice, early detection and monitoring of pregnancy and ensuring that a small team of clinicians known to the woman will provide her with continuity of care during her pregnancy.

The project is now being piloted by community mental health clinicians within North Metropolitan Area Health Service Mental Health. The clinics involved are the Clarkson Community Mental Health Service, Morley Community Mental Health Service and Swan Adult Mental Health Service. Antenatal clinics at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Swan District Hospital and Joondalup Health Campus are also part of the pilot program.

“This is an opportunity to translate research into better services for women,” said Dr. Hauck. “We now know what sorts of problems are likely to arise - this project is aimed at using that knowledge in a really practical way to help these women and their babies.”

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