



Media Release

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Motherhood bliss 'myth'

The notion that pregnancy and new motherhood protect women from anxiety and depression is a myth, according to a psychiatrist at the Royal Women's Hospital.

"In fact, antenatal and postnatal (perinatal) anxiety and depression are more common than most people realise, so women with these problems often go undiagnosed and untreated," said Dr Lia Laios, a Consultant Psychiatrist at the hospital's Centre for Women's Mental Health.

Between 10 and 15 percent of women experience some depression during pregnancy, and up to 40 percent of those women go on to develop postnatal depression. Overall, postnatal depression is diagnosed in almost 16 percent of women giving birth in Australia every year.*

"Unfortunately, perinatal depression and anxiety disorders are often undiagnosed because women may be reluctant to disclose their symptoms with health professionals, or the symptoms may be wrongly attributed to hormonal mood swings or physical changes that occur with pregnancy such as nausea loss of appetite, insomnia and lethargy; or sleep deprivation in the postnatal stage," Dr Laios said.

But general practitioners can play a crucial role in identifying signs of perinatal emotional stress and coordinating holistic care. "They are at the front-line of seeing pregnant and postnatal women who are experiencing stress, anxiety and depression. So they can initiate treatment including a referral to psychiatrist or a psychologist for effective psychotherapy.

"Without the availability of these extra community resources, perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are a serious public health issue that can trigger a cascade of dangerous medical, psychological and social consequences for not only the mother, but also her pregnancy, baby, partner and family – including her ability to bond with her baby.

"And persistent maternal stress, depression and anxiety can have detrimental effects on a baby's emotional and cognitive development. At their worst, perinatal mood disorders can lead to maternal suicide or infanticide.," Dr Laios said.

The Women's Centre for Mental Health hosted a workshop this month to help psychologists from Victoria and interstate improve and expand their skills and understanding about perinatal mental illness.

* <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

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