

## Community Paediatric Review – September 2008

### Case study

The Parent and Baby Wellbeing Program was developed to provide immediate and responsive help to perinatal women adjusting to parenthood. Kristen, a 30-year old married woman, called the clinic for help with depression after the birth of her first child, 6-month old Iris. A detailed psychological assessment revealed a history of psychiatric illness, with previous depressive episodes and an unstable upbringing, including abandonment, conflict and criticism in her family of origin. Kristin's depression was perpetuated by lack of family and social support and her self critical and perfectionistic cognitive style. Despite these difficulties she had considerable strengths including intelligence, a supportive partner, motivation to exert changes in her life and a desire to "be a good Mum" to Iris.

Kristen was offered both group and individual treatment through our Infant Clinic. 'The Getting Ahead of Postnatal Depression program' consists of 12-weeks of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to improve maternal mood. Women learn coping strategies to help manage their moods in the context of parenting an infant. There are also three couple sessions, providing information and support for partners. During the group, Kristen found that her mood became increasingly more manageable as she learned strategies to cope.

Following the CBT group, Kristen took part in the BabyHUGS which focuses on Kristen and Iris's interactions. The three-session module was developed to promote the relationship between mother and baby, and uses play, observation, learning to understand baby cues and examining parental responses to infant cues. It appeared Kristen had limited capacity for sensitive attunement and appropriate responsiveness with Iris. She found it hard to acknowledge or respond to Iris's expressions of hurt, anger, or neediness. Kristen was unable to put words on Iris's experience and provide comforting reassurance, such as responding by saying "You're okay, you just bumped your head. Come here and cuddle with Mummy for a bit." However, through modelling within the group, both by other group members and by the facilitators, Kristen began to recognise Iris's 'negative' feelings and respond appropriately and with increased sensitivity.

The Infant Clinic is able to offer a further experience to consolidate gains the 'Intuitive Mothering' group. It incorporates movement and dance with music and builds on how each woman intuitively interacts with her infant. Through this 8-week experiential group, Kristen increasingly saw Iris as a unique little person in her own right. They had repeated interactions of mutual joy, which served to strengthen their relationship. Finally, Kristen engaged in 12-sessions of individual therapy, which was able to explore some of the painful earlier family of origin experiences and expand her parenting skills.

This case study outlines a comprehensive approach to postnatal depression treatment, which includes maternal mood management strategies, inclusion of partner, mother-infant dyadic work, an opportunity to learn from other women (not only for 'experts') as well as individualised treatment of one's early relationships. Not all women need every component but this model worked very well for Kristen who had multiple difficulties to overcome. At the conclusion of therapy Kristen was positive, able to relate well to Iris and had dealt with some long-standing issues. Early identification through the Parent and Baby Wellbeing Program prevented longer term problems.

## **Parent and Baby Wellbeing Program, developed by the Parent-Infant Research Institute (PIRI) at Austin Health**

The Parent and Baby Wellbeing program is a new initiative funded by HBA/Mutual Community. It aims to provide new mothers and fathers, who have HBA cover, an easier way to access extra telephone and clinic visits, should they need it. Receiving additional support during this time can be helpful, particularly if the new parents experience any of the following:

- Feeling overwhelmed or struggling to cope
- Worrying about their baby's behaviour
- Difficulties feeling bonded to their baby
- Feeling depressed or anxious
- A premature birth

The program offers services such as consultation and support through PIRI at Austin Health, Melbourne. The Institute has worked for many years to improve the recognition of depression and anxiety in the postnatal population through training health professionals and implementing screening programs.

For more information: [www.piri.org.au](http://www.piri.org.au)