



November 14, 2012

An Open Letter to the Maternal Mental Health Community and the Media:

Postpartum Support International (PSI), the organization dedicated to bringing awareness to women's reproductive mental health, along with numerous other well-respected regional and local mental health agencies as well as esteemed medical and psychiatric professionals working in the field of Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders (PMADS), have come together in an effort to help broaden awareness and reduce stigma. They strongly disagree with what they collectively feel was an opinion-based story that ran last week in USA Today, US News & World Report, on CBS News and in Psych Central along with many other media outlets, highlighting the findings of a recent research study published in a prominent medical journal.

The article, authored by Domar, Moragianni, Ryley and Urato, in the journal of *Human Reproduction*, October 2012 -- *The risks of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor use in infertile women: a review of the impact on fertility, pregnancy, neonatal health and beyond*, cited that "Antidepressant use during pregnancy is associated with increased risks of miscarriage, birth defects, preterm birth, newborn behavioral syndrome, persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn and possible longer term neurobehavioral effects. There is no evidence of improved pregnancy outcomes with antidepressant use."

PSI and its members believe that the article is misleading and over-generalizes the effects of psychotropic medications being used in pregnancy. The general consensus among clinicians is that the article offers a one-sided perspective discounting the valuable and positive medical and psychological benefits these medications can have on women, their children and families when a new mother is in the throes of a Perinatal Mood or Anxiety Disorder. PSI feels the article is deceiving to women and their families about what is considered to be a very nuanced and specialized issue. The journal article itself propagates public fear and stigma, which PSI and others in the reproductive community are working hard to de-mystify and eliminate.

"For women with mild to moderate depression, psychotherapy and alternative treatments are absolutely the first choice of treatment. However, for those women experiencing moderate to severe depression that is considerably impairing their functioning, antidepressants must be an option as they do alleviate symptoms in this population and they can save lives," said Dr. Lucy J. Puryear, M.D., Associate Professor, Baylor College of Medicine and Medical Director, The Women's Place: Center for Reproductive Psychiatry and Immediate Past President, Postpartum Support International. "Our challenge is to continue to look for the safest and most effective ways to manage patient care during this vulnerable time -- from conception through pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period."

"While Postpartum Support International supports colleagues and researchers working in the field of maternal mental health and perinatal psychiatry, we are disheartened that the article in USA Today was written based on clinical opinions as it was not substantiated by a published research study, nor were the authors specialists in the risks and benefits of medication use during the perinatal phase. It's our experience that articles like this impact women and their families by creating tremendous anxiety about treatment options, therefore leaving these women at risk for abruptly discontinuing medication or not seeking the care they may need," said Leslie Lowell Stoutenburg, RNC, MS, Director, Pregnancy and

Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorder Program at Alexian Brothers Hospital Network in Illinois and President, Postpartum Support International.

“At PSI, we weigh the integrity of all research and literature with respect to various points of view in order to achieve best practices and standards of care in the field; we always look forward to the publication of further research that can educate and inform the public about perinatal mood disorders,” concluded Stoutenburg.

Untreated depression is the number one complication of pregnancy and yet research shows many new mothers are not asked whether they are feeling depressed or anxious during their pregnancy by a health care provider. It’s PSI’s belief that when a woman is able to become adequately informed, screened or treated for maternal depression, not only is her individual suffering alleviated but the chances for positive outcomes for her baby, and entire family are greatly improved.

Postpartum Support International (PSI) is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to helping women suffering from Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders, including postpartum depression, the most common complication of childbirth. Founded in 1987 by Jane Honikman, MS, PSI was established to increase awareness among public and professional communities about the emotional difficulties that women can experience during and after pregnancy. The organization offers support, reliable information, best practice training, and volunteer coordinators in all 50 U.S. states as well as 26 countries around the world. Working together with volunteers, caring professionals, researchers, legislators and others, PSI is committed to eliminating stigma and ensuring that compassionate and quality care is available to all families.

PSI and its members continue to hope that a national spotlight may shine on this issue to help highlight the need for better care in the field of women’s reproductive health.

Signed:

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