

Nursing professor leads the way for 'telepsychiatry' by nurses to treat postpartum depression

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Women suffering with postpartum depression may in future be able to receive psychotherapy from a specially trained nurse over the phone, eliminating barriers to treatment such as distance, time, or the availability of a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Dr. Cindy-Lee Dennis, Canada Research Chair in Perinatal Community Health at the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, is the lead investigator in the Postpartum Depression Interpersonal Psychotherapy Trial, which is evaluating an innovative way to deliver treatment for postpartum depression, particularly to women in rural or remote areas where they may not have access to a psychologist or psychiatrist, let alone one who specializes in postpartum depression.

“This is pushing the boundaries of the role of nurses,” says Dr. Dennis.

In this research study, nurses are highly trained by psychiatrists to provide interpersonal psychotherapy, a brief and highly structured manual-based therapy that addresses interpersonal issues in depression such as family conflicts or role transitions. It has been shown to be an effective treatment for general depression and it is typically provided face-to-face by a psychiatrist or psychologist.

To improve access to care, it is being offered over the telephone in approximately 12 weekly sessions lasting 50 to 60 minutes.

Two hundred and forty clinically depressed women across 24 health regions in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC will participate in the trial.

This study, funded with more than \$900,000 by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, will determine if the telephone therapy given by nurses is an effective way to treat postpartum depression.

Source: University of Toronto

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