

Team develops iPhone app to screen for postpartum depression

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Researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital's (MGH) Ammon-Pinizzotto Center for Women's Mental Health have developed the [MGH Perinatal Depression Scale \(MGHPDS\)](#), a free iPhone application designed to refine how women around the world are screened for postpartum depression (PPD). The app includes questionnaires about mood, anxiety, sleep and stress at important time periods during and after pregnancy. The questionnaires will identify which specific symptoms are most critical in the diagnosis of PPD in women ages 18-45 who are pregnant or up to 12 weeks postpartum.

"The rapid growth of mHealth in psychiatry has led to the development of a variety of web-driven screening tools for many [mental health](#) issues, yet to date there has been little attention to the use of technology to better diagnose and treat PPD," says Lee S. Cohen, MD, director of the Ammon-Pinizzotto Center and professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "Further complicating matters is the wide prevalence of false positives, which occur approximately 25 percent of the time when using currently available scales."

PPD is the most common psychiatric complication women experience following the birth of a child. Although 10 to 15 percent of women may suffer from PPD, it is frequently undiagnosed and untreated, which can lead to lasting negative effects for both the mother and her child. The MGHPDS app blends together digital versions of perinatal depression screening tools such as the Edinburgh Postpartum Depression Scale, a 10-question self-rating [scale](#) which is the most common tool for identifying [women](#) at risk for PPD, with other instruments that measure symptoms associated with perinatal psychiatric illness - such as sleep disturbance, anxiety and perceived stress.

"Those who download the app and complete the included questionnaires may also consent to share their scores with researchers within our center here at MGH, further assisting in the development of an even shorter scale with greater specificity than what is currently available," says Cohen. "It is our hope that - as screening for PPD becomes increasingly common across the U.S. and globally - easy-to-use tools like the MGHPDS, which can be readily used on smartphones and other digital devices, will lead to more accurate screening of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and to improved clinical outcomes for patients."

More information: The app is free and can be downloaded via the App Store [here](#). An Android version will launch later this fall, with version 2.0 of the app launching in the second half of 2018.

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

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