



Alachua County Maternal Mental Health Needs Assessment 2017

Alachua County
Perinatal
Mental Health
Coalition



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Depression and anxiety are at their highest rates in the lifecycle during the childbearing years from puberty to menopause. Perinatal mental illnesses are a leading public health concern. Nationally, up to one in five women (approximately 20%) will experience what is known as a Perinatal Mood or Anxiety Disorder (“PMD”) related to the time of pregnancy and the year after delivery; including those who experience perinatal loss.

PMDs have been identified in women of every race, ethnicity, culture, income level and education level during childbearing age. Men and partners also experience PMDs at the rate of approximately one out of every ten.²⁹ Minorities, women with comorbidities of pregnancy and those with limited resources are at heightened risk for mental health complications during the perinatal time frame. To our knowledge, no previous study has been carried out in Alachua county or Florida to specifically identify the status of maternal mental health.

You cannot tell by looking. Every woman needs to be informed, screened and offered appropriate services.

More than 900,000 parents in the United States experience depression or other perinatal mood disorders annually.²⁶ This makes PMD the leading health complication during the pregnancy and postpartum timeframe

In the most severe cases, women are taking their lives and at times, the child’s life, while suffering in silence and believing they are alone with no relief to be found.

The prevalence rate of PMD surpasses the *combined* rate of gestational diabetes and preeclampsia.

In Florida more than 200,000 babies are born each year. In Alachua County, Florida, almost 3,000 babies are born annually. The combined two-generation costs of untreated perinatal mood disorders for both are: \$900,000,000 (Florida) and \$12,600,000 (Alachua County).⁹

The Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorder (PMD) spectrum is often lumped into one term, postpartum depression; however, this term does not capture the fact that other mood disorders and anxiety also occur during pregnancy and after. The newest research available on perinatal anxiety reveals prevalence rates at least as high as for depression.



The risk factors and causes that lead to PMDs are complex and numerous; however, it is imperative to identify those who are at risk and ensure timely and appropriate support and resources. Alachua county residents are largely uninformed as to risk factors for PMDs.

When left unrecognized and untreated-

Unrecognized and untreated perinatal mental illnesses have been linked to low rates of prenatal care, increased rates of preterm birth, stillbirth, perinatal death and neurodevelopmental disorders.³² The cognitive, social and emotional development of a child born to a mother or parents with untreated PMDs are put at great risk.¹⁶ Mothers experiencing PMDs are at heightened risks for numerous adverse health outcomes including preeclampsia, cardiovascular disease and



death.¹⁸ Impaired maternal/child bonding and attachment, lower rates of breastfeeding, strain on relationships and families, maternal death and factors leading to involvement of the legal system (divorce, child protective services) as well as significant financial expenses are all related to unrecognized and untreated PMDs.^{15, 37}

Oftentimes, the functioning of the woman or man affected impairs the ability to parent appropriately, work or perform other essential roles and functions of daily living.

As if experiencing a PMD alone isn't debilitating enough, women with comorbid conditions including history of trauma, high risk pregnancies, perinatal loss, substance abuse disorders^{35,38} and intimate partner violence have compounded risk factors.^{23,39}

Awareness, prevention, early identification and the referral process are all very important elements in addressing this major public health concern. It is in

this context that the community needs assessment was carried out by the Alachua County Perinatal Mental Health Coalition. The purpose of this undertaking is to assess the current local understanding of perinatal mental illnesses, identify gaps, and develop recommendations for addressing PMDs for healthier families in Alachua County, FL.

Barriers currently exist in Alachua County for consumers and providers:

- Stigma and fear surround issues related to perinatal mental illness and are largely the culprit for many never receiving help.
- In large part, there is a current lack of understanding for the public and providers about the spectrum of disorders, risk factors, prevalence, treatment options- and to the extent specialized resources do exist for Alachua County residents, there is little knowledge about how to access them or what is provided.
- Alachua County medical providers who responded indicated a lack of training about PMDs and lack of referral sources for their perinatal patients, specifically those who lack resources to pay for specialized care.
- Both consumers and providers report lack of communication and coordination between different providers and referral sources. During the needs assessment launch meeting open to the public, community members listed as a priority a need to address this lack of coordination and communication.
- Local listening efforts of this assessment found a gap between what is reported to be provided in our community and community members reporting they cannot find services. This appears particularly true for those with less resources to pay for specialized mental health services.

The two birthing hospitals in Alachua County graciously participated. Both report current absence of recommended training for nurses,

lactation consultants and social workers in maternal mental health. Neither currently report having protocol for providing emotional support for parents of NICU babies. Neither are currently equipped to provide best practice care to patients with severe PMD symptoms, including properly trained staff.

The consumer respondents were not representative of the total population in Alachua County. This is a large area of importance and a considerable barrier to be addressed moving forward in consideration of methodology in future needs assessments. This was the first time our community was engaged to participate in a needs assessment focused on this specific area.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations arrived upon following identification of existing barriers:

- **Develop an AWARENESS campaign** specific to the populations represented in Alachua County, FL.
- **Address and improve early IDENTIFICATION of PMDs** through establishing recommendations for

Encourage all providers interfacing with perinatal women to provide awareness information to women and men during pregnancy & postpartum.

universal screening and patient education on risk factors and resources for treatment.

- **Develop and employ evidence-based continuing EDUCATION** and training opportunities on an ongoing basis on perinatal mental health for providers and professionals who interact with the perinatal population. While OBGYN and Midwives are the primary source of care for perinatal women in Alachua County, other providers including but not limited to pediatricians, lactation consultants, doulas, service

providers such as WIC and home visiting programs are also urged to support screening and education efforts. The ACPMHC will address adoption or creation of a toolkit for providers including evidence-based recommendations of care.



- **Establish recommendations** for specialist mental health providers serving the perinatal population.
- **Develop and expand evidence-based support networks** to provide peer support groups and other modes of peer support for parents. Currently there are two monthly support groups in one location. Alachua County includes several rural areas without access to the centralization of services in Gainesville. Support groups for parents in rural areas should be addressed in addition to effective and appropriate support for minority populations in Alachua County.
- **Consider a specialized CENTER for collaborative care** to address perinatal mental health conditions, including families who have recently adopted, experience perinatal loss; high-risk pregnancies and substance abuse. *Prioritize* the coordination and follow-up process from screening to referral and treatment/support delivery and follow up.

Adopt strategies to address the needs of pregnant woman and new moms with other co-morbidities.

National recommendations urge a specialized, multidisciplinary approach for effectively addressing PMDs.

- Florida has zero specialized inpatient programs equipped to properly serve women with severe perinatal mental illness.***

- **Address protocol and services for those who require hospitalization** with respect to those who experience severe PMD symptoms including psychosis.
- **Measure changes in awareness, screening and treatment.** The ACPMHC encourages greater community participation and support for goal setting related to measuring outcomes from Phase I to Phase II MMH Needs Assessment to be completed in the year 2020.
- **Address services for low income mothers experiencing postpartum depression at highest rates.**

We wish to express sincere thanks to each individual, provider and organization/entity who helped make this first inquiry possible.

year 2020. Alachua County has a wealth of resources, higher education institutions and organizations committed to a healthy community. We are uniquely positioned as a leader in our state to address perinatal mental illnesses. The ACPMHC is committed to creating synthesis with those serving the purpose of a healthier Alachua County.

