

Singapore releases first set of guidelines for perinatal mental health

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The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the rising incidence of maternal depression



Singapore's first set of guidelines on perinatal mental health was launched recently at SingHealth Duke-NUS Maternal and Child Health Research Institute (MCHRI) Asia Pacific Maternal and Child Health Conference and Integrated Platform For Research In Advancing Maternal & Child Health Outcomes (IPRAMHO) International Meeting 2023 in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH).

The guidelines, unveiled by Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Communications and Information, casts the spotlight on the rising incidence of maternal depression, and the urgent need to address the issue.

"In KKH, we saw a 47 per cent increase in patients who screened positive for postnatal depression between April 2019 to March 2020 and April 2021 to March 2022. This increase during the COVID-19 pandemic mirrors patterns seen in other countries. It is a major concern as it impacts not just the mother but also the child. Evidence has proven that anxiety and depression in the mother can lead to adverse consequences", said Associate Professor Helen Chen, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Psychological Medicine, KKH, and Chairperson, Workgroup for the Guidelines.

Some of the key recommendations for the Guidelines for Perinatal Mental Health include- Increasing awareness and availability of advice on preconception mental health; Optimising care, treatment and support for women with antenatal and postnatal depression; Increasing accessibility to mental health support for women who have experienced severe medical trauma, and those with mental health needs during their pregnancy; Tailoring mental healthcare needs for adolescents and women with special needs; Promoting higher caregiver quality for perinatal and infant mental health needs.

The Singapore Perinatal Mental Health Guidelines is part of a series of guidelines designed by IPARAMHO, a main programme by MCHRI, to transform national health in Singapore. The guidelines will be made available to healthcare professionals through the College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists Singapore.