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Women nearly five times more likely to recover from Postnatal Depression in World-first trial of online treatment

A World-first trial of online treatment for women diagnosed with postnatal depression resulted in a dramatic improvement for more than 70 per cent of depressed women.

The $125,000 trial, by the Parent-infant Research Institute and funded by beyondblue, included women from all around Australia who experienced moderate to severe postnatal depression and agreed to take part in the MumMoodBooster program.

MumMoodBooster is the first fully developed and evaluated online treatment for women, with online sessions, videos, and discussion forums for both mums involved in the program and their partners.

Each year in Australia, about 40,000 women experience postnatal depression by the time their baby is three months old. When untreated, PND has a devastating effect on the mother’s mental health, which may affect her relationships with her infant and her family.

More than 50 per cent of mothers with postnatal depression don’t seek help because they worry that they will be seen as a failure, don’t know the signs of depression or are concerned about passing medications to the baby through breastmilk.

Lead researcher Professor Jeannette Milgrom, from the Parent-Infant Research Institute (PIRI), said women engaged well with the program with two thirds posting on the online community forum during the trial and the results had been overwhelmingly positive.

“Our results show that our fully-developed online program, MumMoodBooster, is an effective treatment option for women with clinically diagnosed PND. This program is potentially accessible to large numbers of women in metropolitan, rural and remote areas,” she said.

“MumMoodBooster may change the way women with PND are treated after they are diagnosed. Women can receive treatment in the comfort of their own home which in turn will help to relieve the burden on existing health services.”

Of the women who participated in existing standard routine care for PND, only 15.8 per cent had recovered from their depression at the end of the 12-week trial. In contrast, of the women who had used the MumMoodBooster online intervention and telephone support, more than four times as many women (71.4 per cent) were no longer diagnosed as depressed at the end of the trial.

beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman said if implemented nationally, this program could benefit thousands of Australian women who might be experiencing postnatal depression and are not aware of the help available, are too embarrassed or too ashamed to reach out for help from a health professional.

“We know many mums with PND are afraid people will think they are not good mothers, and we hope they will use this online program at home to help them with their mental health and their parenting,” she said.

“This study shows that an online program with interactive options, supported by some telephone coaching, is a very effective way of treating PND.”

Post and Antenatal Depression Association Acting (PANDA) CEO Jenni Richardson said a specialist perinatal helpline or online program accessed in the home can be life changing for women.

“We hear from distressed mums who will not seek help because of the fear of being labelled a ‘bad mother’ or who struggle to leave their home due to depression or anxiety on top of the demands of a new baby. PIRI and beyondblue are to be congratulated on the MumMoodBooster program,” she said.

The Parent-Infant Research Institute partnered with Dr Brian Danaher and Dr John Steeley from the Oregon Research Institute in the US, who are behaviour change experts and spent three years (prior to the beyondblue-funded trial) developing an internet treatment intervention for women diagnosed with PND, which was funded by the National Institute of Health. The trial also received initial funding from the Windermere Foundation.

MumMoodBooster is currently seeking new mums who may be struggling to cope for an ongoing treatment trial. To register or find out more, please go to our www.mummoodbooster.com or contact a phone coach on (03) 9496 4496.

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