

An internet-based treatment for post-natal depression



Dr Heather O'Mahen, University of Exeter:

“Our hope is that this will allow more women to access and benefit from support, with all the knock-on positives that come from that: happier families, improved quality of life for mums; and a reduction in the demands such cases can bring to stretched health services around the world. This treatment is an accessible and potentially cost-effective option, and one that could easily be incorporated into mental healthcare provision.”

One in ten mothers in the UK experience postnatal depression. There are many symptoms, including difficulty sleeping, low mood and feeling unable to cope. For some women, postnatal depression can also cause problems with how the mother responds to her baby's needs. Treatment with psychological therapies has a positive benefit but healthcare providers don't have the resources to treat everyone who might benefit.

Evidence suggests that many women with postnatal depression do not speak to their doctor or health visitor. This might be because they worry that people will think they are a bad parent. Netmums.com is a parenting website that has chat rooms supervised by trained parent supporters and specialist health visitors. The post-natal depression chat room is one of their busiest and Netmums has found that many people are very depressed, have been depressed for a long time and can't find treatment in their local communities.

What Happened Next?

The aim of this project was to develop and test an online therapy for women with postnatal depression which they could complete in their own time and in their own home. Women who had suffered from postnatal depression helped design the therapy.

Women from the Netmums website were invited to take part in the study. Half received the therapy, which was based on a form of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy called Behavioural Activation. Women were also able to speak to a mental health worker by telephone. The project found that women who received the online therapy liked the treatment and improved more rapidly than women who received regular care. Women in the therapy continued to feel better 16 months after the treatment.

This treatment is now available to all women through the Netmums website and versions are being used in different areas in the NHS. The results have also been included in NICE's Antenatal and Postnatal Depression Guidelines for doctors. The next steps for the project are to find out whether this therapy can be used for women who suffer from anxiety during pregnancy and after birth.



References:

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Useful Links:

clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk/research/Netmums

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