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NICE seeks to support new mothers with mental health problems

NICE is calling on general practice staff to assess the mental health of all women who have recently given birth, as fears some may be left unsupported.



Some symptoms of mental health problems, such as changes to appetite or sleeping patterns, can be masked by what is considered normal for pregnant and postnatal women.

NICE – the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence – suggest that the routine six-week postnatal appointment could provide an opportunity for new mothers to be asked about their mental health.

Dr Andrew Black, GP at Mortimer medical practice and deputy chair of the NICE indicator advisory committee said: “GPs play a vital role in helping vulnerable people to get the correct diagnosis and the support they need.

“These indicators, put forward by NICE, could help GPs to identify and support their patients who are most at risk. This can only be a good thing.”

It is estimated that about one in eight women experience anxiety or depression whilst pregnant, and up to one in five do during the first year after childbirth. [And a recent report \(http://www.maternalmentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NHSIQ-](http://www.maternalmentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NHSIQ-)

[Improving-access-to-perinatal-mental-health-services-in-England-0915.pdf](#) by NHS Improving Quality found that women’s experience of treatment for mental health problems during pregnancy or afterwards was variable.

NICE says that clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) should record how many women with a suspected mental health problem during pregnancy or the postnatal period receive a comprehensive mental health assessment. And if referred, how many of these women then gain access to psychological services within six weeks.

[These recommendations are being consulted on as part of NICE’s draft indicator menu. \(https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators\)](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators)

NICE indicators seek to support GPs and CCGs by identifying areas of care we can focus on to improve local and national health. The aim is to tackle widespread public health challenges one patient at a time.

Professor Daniel Keenan, associate medical director, Manchester University Hospitals and chair of the NICE indicator advisory committee, said: “Indicators are a key part of NICE’s drive to improve people’s lives, enhance the quality of care in the NHS and use its resources wisely.

“The indicators in this consultation are not final. And I would strongly encourage everyone with an interest in the development of evidence-based indicators to tell us their views. Your feedback will help us finalise the NICE indicator menu in August.”

Other draft indicators in this year’s consultation focus on diabetes prevention, increasing the awareness of cervical screening programmes and the development of an autism register.

[The consultation will run for four weeks, closing on 08 March 2017. \(https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators\)](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators)

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Dr Andrew Black, GP and deputy chair of the NICE indicator advisory committee

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Professor Daniel Keenan, chair of the NICE indicator advisory committee



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[Consultation on NICE Indicators \(https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators\)](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/standards-and-indicators/consultation-on-nice-indicators)
