

Treating depression in new mothers

Excitement. Anticipation. Joy. These are common emotions experienced during pregnancy and after the birth of a baby. But mothers may also feel overwhelmed, anxious and even angry. Pregnancy is not easy and caring for an infant is hard work. No matter how much a new mother prepares for this event, there are often some unexpected feelings that surface. Any woman who is pregnant or has recently given birth can be affected, regardless of how many previous, uncomplicated pregnancies she has had.



"Ante and postpartum depression know no socio-economic boundaries," says Kristin Ahrens, M.D., staff psychiatrist at Horizon (see bio on page 3). "Any woman can experience difficulties with any pregnancy. It's important to be able to identify the symptoms and seek help as soon as possible."

Horizon is setting up a special program for pregnant women and new mothers who are experiencing depression. Dr. Ahrens says it has been difficult getting past the stigma attached to postpartum depression and educating women and, often, their OB/Gyns that this situation is serious... and treatable.

"Women need to understand they have options in these cases," says Dr. Ahrens. "They need to be able to distinguish between the 'baby blues' – which are very common and usually disappear in a few weeks after the baby's birth – and depression, which can often linger and worsen."

Dr. Ahrens says the first month postpartum is a critical bonding time for mothers and their babies. But if a mother is experiencing difficulty, she might not be taking proper care of herself or her baby. She might not be eating properly or might be drinking or smoking too much, which can affect her health and her baby's health, especially if she's nursing.

Horizon is offering a referral source for primary care physicians and OB/Gyns throughout Western New York. It is important that the doctors and their patients know there is support within the community for women suffering from ante and postpartum depression.

"We thoroughly evaluate these women, determine a strategy to help them deal with their depression and then help them work at overcoming this condition," says Dr. Ahrens. "Treatment can range from counseling to medication to a combination of both." Contrary to popular belief, antidepressant medication can be used safely during and after pregnancy and, often, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

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Gordon James Photography



From the desk of...

Hak Ko, MD
Medical Director

Horizon now offers buprenorphine medication as an adjunct to treatment for opiate addiction.

Opium is the only drug that has started a war between two nations: Britain and China. Today, it remains as the most powerful addiction drug. Opioid addiction is estimated to affect up to one million Americans, a number that continues to grow despite costly prevention and treatment programs.

Until 2002, methadone was the only medical maintenance treatment available for opiate addiction. It has proven to be effective for reducing cravings and preventing relapse; however its significant abuse potential and daily clinical visit requirements made it very difficult to maintain normal social and occupational life.

Buprenorphine, an opioid partial agonist, was approved by the FDA in 2000 and seems to offer a reasonable alternative to methadone. Its unique mechanism of action – binding tightly to opioid receptors while activating them only partially – makes Buprenorphine a very safe and effective drug for detoxification and/or maintenance therapy for opioid addiction.

It is the very first drug approved by the FDA to be prescribed in a regular office setting and given as a monthly prescription as long as drug counseling is also provided.

Horizon is excited to be able to provide this option to our consumers who are ready to take the path to recovery and return to normal life. ♥



Effective rehabilitation and recovery for persons with mental illness.

Traditionally, mental health care has had a goal of assisting individuals in “stabilizing” and then maintaining that stabilization through medication and therapy. That is all changing, however, as the mental health system moves to a recovery-oriented system in which the goal is a return to active participation in the community.

Persons with psychiatric disabilities have the same goals and dreams as any other person. They want a decent place to live, suitable work, social activities and friends to whom they can turn in times of crisis. As more research has been conducted on mental illness, more has been learned about the fact that recovery is possible, and that rehabilitation outcomes for people with psychiatric disabilities are influenced by the effectiveness of the people, programs and service systems with which the consumer interacts.

According to William Anthony, Ph.D., director of the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University, “recovery is a continuous, deeply personal, individual effort that leads to growth, discovery and the change of attitudes, values, goals and, perhaps, roles.”

To better assist the individuals it serves in their efforts to reach their life goals, Horizon introduced a full program of rehabilitation and recovery services, including relapse prevention, symptom reduction, goal setting, health and wellness, vocational programming and more.

“Our programs focus on the individuals’ strengths,” says Christine Ziemba, senior

coordinator of Rehabilitation and Recovery Services at Horizon. “We instill hope as we work with individuals to help them reach their goals of recovery as quickly as possible.”

Horizon is committed to knowing and deeply understanding each individual its counselors work with. Staff members are open to being guided by the individuals they serve, and are willing to stand by values that enhance the humanity and dignity of those individuals. They remain flexible, creative and open to trying what might be possible, including innovation, experimentation and unconventional solutions. Horizon embraces the Hallmarks of Person-Centered Planning.

“We start by asking consumers what they want out of life, what values they adhere to”

“We start by asking consumers what they want out of life, what values they adhere to,” says Ziemba. “Then we work together to set meaningful, focused goals that will support them in their recovery process. And we involve family members, physicians, psychiatrists, counselors and other significant individuals who can help.”

For more information on Horizon’s Rehabilitation and Recovery Services program, please contact Christine Ziemba at 716.831.1800. ♥

MEET OUR Board

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Title : Chief

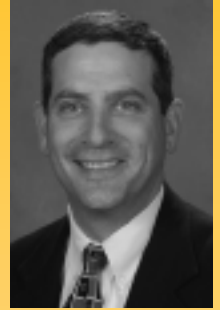
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On which Horizon Board(s) do you serve? “I serve on the Health Management Group board.”

How did you come to be on the Board? “Through my long friendships with Anne Constantino and fellow board member, Mike Mistriner.”

What have you found most rewarding about serving on the Board? “For me, the rewards come from being able to apply the experience I’ve gained over the past 20 years in the private sector in a positive way in the community... a community where I live, raise a family and of which I am proud to be part.”

What do you want people to know about Horizon? “I would like people to know about the quality of all the people involved in Horizon. It takes a special person to give selfless commitment to improving the lives of others. There are not many professions where, at the end of the day, one can say ‘I made a difference in someone’s life today.’ The people involved in the Horizon organizations can say it each and every day.” ♥

According to the National Institute of Mental Health website, about 22.1 percent of Americans 18 and older – or one in five adults – will suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.

thePathtoRecovery

Here is the true story of a consumer who overcame many obstacles to turn his life around. Last names have been omitted for privacy.

When he was a kid, Brett would place bets on the basketball court or in card games. He went to his first casino in college. His gambling wasn't yet out of control, but Brett knew he had a problem. He also developed an addiction to alcohol. The situation escalated when he moved to Rochester; he'd go to the race track and OTB to bet on the horses or to the casino. Before he knew it, he'd maxed out more than a dozen credit cards and started writing bad checks.

"There were times when I walked away with thousands of dollars in my pocket," says Brett, a 31-year-old Buffalo native. "But the money wasn't the thrill, it was the gambling.

So I never was able to hang onto it."

Two years ago, Brett was managing a restaurant in Chicago, not the best environment for an alcoholic. He hit a personal rock bottom after receiving a DUI citation, when he was arrested with three times the legal amount of alcohol in his system. He barely remembers it, because he was in "an alcoholic fog." He was court-sentenced to attend counseling, which he put off until he moved back to Buffalo. That's when he came to Horizon.

"The funny thing was, I'd rarely drink while I gambled," says Brett. "I actually avoided drinking then, because the gambling was all I could think about. I knew I needed help.

"Gambling is a very vicious thing," he says. "I started opening other people's mail and doing other things I am not proud of.

But then I found my spirituality and my commitment to self-help and things began to turn around."

"Horizon helped create an environment that made change possible for Brett," says Judy Tejada, his counselor. "He has been extremely successful in redirecting his life."

Brett credits his spirituality, Gamblers Anonymous and Horizon with providing phenomenal support in his efforts. He's been sober for two years and hasn't gambled in more than one year. He voluntarily had himself barred from local casinos. He quit the restaurant business and went back to graduate school; his goal is to teach physical education, and he starts his student teaching in just a few weeks. He knows the only thing between him and his addictions is his recovery program, and he's taking it one day at a time. ❤️

Hello
My name is
Kristin Ahrens, MD
Staff Psychiatrist

Gordon James Photography



Kristin Ahrens' specialty is in psychiatric illness in pregnant and postpartum women, so she was the perfect person to head up a similar program being established at Horizon (see article on page one). Before joining Horizon in August, Dr. Ahrens had set up a similar program at Erie County Medical Center, where she was the medical director of the department of outpatient psychiatry. She also established and will continue to lead Western New York's only postpartum depression support group.

"Antepartum and postpartum disorders know no socio-economic barriers," says Dr. Ahrens. "Any woman can experience symptoms and

issues that can and should be taken seriously, as they can be treated."

Dr. Ahrens says she was excited at the opportunity to do more clinical work at Horizon and to be able to assist consumers who are very ill and need the extra care. She says she has been thrilled with the level of care offered at Horizon and the staff she has come to know.

"The teamwork and camaraderie between the clinical and non-clinical staff is wonderful," she says. "It really provides much better treatment plans for our consumers."

Dr. Ahrens is an active member of the American Psychiatric Association, the New York State Psychiatric Association, the Western New York Psychiatric Association and the Postpartum Resource Center of New York, Inc. She was honored with the Clinical Teacher of the Year Award by the Residency Training Program in Psychiatry and was the recipient of the Resident Service Award in recognition of her outstanding service to the department of psychiatry at UB. Dr. Ahrens will also continue her duties as assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at UB's School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

A magna cum laude graduate with a doctorate in medicine from UB, Dr. Ahrens also earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from William Smith College. She resides in the city of Buffalo with her husband, Peter, and two children, Gabrielle (6) and Theodore (4). ❤️

A mother taking illegal drugs during pregnancy increases her risk for anemia, blood and heart infections, skin infections, hepatitis and other infectious diseases.

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"Most women have never experienced anything like this and either don't know how to verbalize their feelings or have difficulty admitting what they're going through," says Dr. Ahrens. "Our goal is to get the word out that our treatment program works and to help put the joy back into this very special time for new mothers."

For more information on Horizon's psychiatric treatment program for pregnant women and new mothers, please call Maria Pasceri at 831.1800. ♥

The critical period of embryonic development, when the major organ systems develop, starts at about 17 days postconception and is complete by 60 to 70 days. Exposure to certain drugs during this period (17 to 70 days) can cause major birth defects.

Horizon is the largest and most comprehensive outpatient provider of integrated mental health, chemical dependency and medical services in WNY.

HorizonHealthPulse is published for the employees, consumers, Board and friends of Horizon Health Services. Please share this newsletter with a friend. If you would like additional copies of this newsletter or if you have any questions or comments about its content, please call Pat Chrzanowski at 716-831-1800 or email her at pchrzanowski@horizon-health.org.

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INSIDE: Treating ante and postpartum depression

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