

PIRI

PARENT-INFANT
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE &
INFANT CLINIC



PIRI is taking treatment for PND online

Women who are unable or who do not wish to attend clinic-based treatment for postnatal depression (PND) will soon be able to access help online.

Women with PND may find it difficult to attend treatment sessions for a multitude of reasons including: transport or child-minding difficulties, travel distance, cost, unwillingness to discuss issues with a health professional for fear of stigma or judgment, etc.

With this in mind, the Parent-Infant Research Institute (PIRI), along with collaborators at the Oregon Research Institute and the Iowa Depression and Clinical Research Centre, have secured funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in the United States to develop and test an online cognitive behavioural treatment program for women with PND.

Why is PIRI interested in online treatment?

1. Online programs can reach more women in need than clinic-based programs.
2. Online program content can be tailored to user characteristics and interests.

3. Users set their own pace and access information at any time.
4. Online-forums provide helpful advice and support within an anonymous environment.
5. The materials accessed can be monitored and information from past sessions can be used to reinforce gains made and to provide ongoing feedback.

The program development stage of this project commenced in July 2009. We will be recruiting women with PND to try the online treatment as part of a feasibility study late next year.

Approximately 80% of the Australian population use the Internet.



The Parent-Infant Research Institute (PIRI) is a vigorous & innovative Australian research institute focusing on understanding, developing and applying treatments to improve parent and infant well-being. PIRI believes that early intervention is the key to better outcomes for families.

While PIRI has a strong research focus, it also comprises a clinical unit (Infant Clinic). The Infant Clinic is a Centre of Excellence and provides clinical services to assist with the difficulties experienced by parents & infants in the first years of life.

LATEST RESEARCH FINDINGS

A comparison of three model care pathways for managing postnatal depression in primary care

This study was made possible by funding from the *beyondblue* Victorian Centre of Excellence in Depression and Related Disorders and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

Objective

The primary aim of this study was to compare three best-practice treatment pathways for postnatal depression (PND) in a randomised controlled trial in terms of effectiveness in alleviating depression.

Treatments

1. Routine management by General Practitioners (GPs)
2. Routine management by GPs coupled with CBT-counselling delivered by trained Maternal & Child Health Nurses (MCHNs)
3. Routine management by GPs coupled with CBT-counselling delivered by Psychologists.

Method

A total of 3,531 postnatal women were screened for depression with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS). Of these, 333 scored above threshold and 169 were referred to the study. Sixty-eight were randomly allocated to receive one of the three treatment conditions.

Results

All three treatments resulted in significant reductions in depressive symptoms; however, women who received the routine management by GPs (without the adjunctive CBT-counselling) retained more depressive symptoms post-treatment.

Women and professionals rated the treatments as highly effective and sufficient.

Conclusions

Following positive screening results for PND, rates of both referral to treatment (51%) and subsequent treatment uptake (40%) were low, consistent with previous studies.

Data for this small study suggest that routine management of PND when augmented by a CBT-counselling package may be successful in reducing the frequency of depressive symptoms compared to routine management alone.

Reference

Milgrom, J., Holt, C., Gemmill, A. W., Ericksen, J., Leigh, B., & Buist, A. (2009). *A comparison of three model pathways for managing postnatal depression in primary care*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Our thanks to the GPs and MCHNs who were involved in this study.

Research Update: PremieStart

PIRI's research into improving neurobehavioural outcomes of premature babies is progressing well.

PremieStart is a randomised controlled trial of mothers with premature infants born less than 30 weeks gestational age. The primary aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of an intervention in enhancing neurobehavioral development in very premature infants.

Intervention

The intervention teaches parents about infant behavioural responses, how to protect infants from stress in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and encourages sensitive involvement from the earliest point. The intervention is delivered to parents while their premature infants are in hospital (8 weekly one-hour sessions).

The study includes a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) at term equivalent age. It is predicted that this intervention will enhance brain development and reduce infant stress, resulting in long-term improvement in cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Improved medical stability, parent-child interaction and parental mental health are also predicted outcomes.

Progress and future plans

We have enrolled 109 mothers (123 babies) into the trial and have started following up infants at 2 years of age. We are proposing a follow-up at three years of age subject to ethics approval and hope to receive funding to follow-up children until school age.

For more information

Contact Dr Carol Newnham or Christopher Holt on 9496 4496.

NEWS & UPDATES

Infant Clinic Statistics for 2009 (non-research)

This year has been busy with 147 women referred to the Infant Clinic (non-research referrals). Of these, 125 women have attended the Infant Clinic for treatment for a total of 838 sessions.

We have run our enhanced group program for postnatal depression and mother-infant interaction four times over the year (6-8 mother-infant dyads per group). The enhanced group program includes 12 sessions of Getting Ahead of PND, 3 sessions of Baby H.U.G.S. and 8 sessions of Intuitive Mothering.

Community H.U.G.S.

Community H.U.G.S. playgroups continue to be run in the City of Whittlesea, and we have worked with Banyule Council and the Children's Protection Society to offer two playgroups at Banyule Community Health Service this year.

We have also received funding to continue running playgroups into 2010 as part of a randomised controlled trial.

For more information, contact Jennie Ericksen or Charlene Schembri on 9496 4496.

PIRI Welcome & Farewell

We say goodbye to clinical psychologist **Dr Megan Andrew**, who leaves PIRI after 4 years of service. Megan facilitated the Getting Ahead of PND and Baby H.U.G.S. group programs, as well as providing individual therapy to mothers and infants. We wish her all the best in her private practice.

We also warmly welcome **Dr Jo du Buisson**, a senior clinical psychologist. Jo's role in the Infant Clinic is to facilitate the Getting Ahead of PND and Baby H.U.G.S. programs and to provide individual treatment to mothers and infants, as well as having other responsibilities within the department.

Holiday Wishes

This is our last newsletter for 2009 and we wish you all the very best for the holiday season.

Thankyou to all of you who have been involved with PIRI or the Infant Clinic in 2009.



2010 TRAINING CALENDAR

We are in the process of finalising our training calendar for 2010, so stay tuned!

FEBRUARY

A two-day workshop for MCHNs interested in co-facilitating Community H.U.G.S. playgroups next year. The workshop will provide skills in working with mothers and their infants following postnatal depression, using a 10-session playgroup program.

MARCH

A one-day workshop for health professionals interested in learning skills to assist families to prepare for the changes and challenges of a new baby. The workshop is based on our evaluated Towards Parenthood program. Training to deliver the telephone counselling package that accompanies the self-help workbook will be provided.

April

A one-day workshop presented by Dr Carol Newnham, neuropsychologist, researcher and editor of *premierepress* about understanding and resolving interactional difficulties of mothers and their premature infants.

Expressions of interest are invited. For more information, visit www.piri.org.au or contact Jennie Ericksen on 9496 4496.

PIRI & INFANT CLINIC TEAM

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