



Lisa Cross and
Amy Hammers

Joy Followed by Sadness

Area experts shed light on maternal mental health.

MAY HAS BEEN DECLARED Maternal Mental Health Month by Governor Mark Dayton. So, in the spirit of promoting awareness and advocacy for this issue, we talked to Maple Grove resident Lisa Cross and Dr. Amy Hammers. Cross co-directs Pregnancy & Postpartum Support MN (PPSM) and Hammers is an OB-GYN M.D. at Clinic Sofia in Maple Grove.

Cross is a therapist with a private practice in addition to co-directing non-profit PPSM. She chose to specialize in perinatal mental health following her own struggle with postpartum obsessive compulsive disorder after the birth of her first child. "At the time [2004], there wasn't a lot of information out there," Cross says. She had

a hard time finding a therapist who knew about the disorder.

PPSM was founded in 2006 to provide support and awareness to women with pregnancy and postpartum mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD). Members of the organization range from mental health and perinatal practitioners, to service organizations, to mothers recovering from PMAD offering their help through peer support.

A critical part of PPSM's work is the organization's free helpline which works as a guide for those asking questions or gathering accurate information. Callers can rely on a call back within 24 hours from one of the licensed mental health professional volunteers who staff the helpline.

"That help could be a therapy, it could be medication management with a psychiatrist, it could be social support through groups or networking, or it could be peer support," Cross says.

Because calling a helpline can be a big step, PPSM makes alternative ways of contact available through text or email.

"A lot of women may be reluctant," Hammers says about discussing postpartum depression. "They might feel guilty they are not succeeding as they think they should."

Depression is more common in mothers than one might think. According to Hammers, most sources say 10 to 20 percent of women experience postpartum depression. That's about one in seven women. Most experience symptoms 4 to 6 weeks after delivery, but women can be diagnosed with postpartum depression anytime leading up to, or within, the first 12 months after delivery.

Women affected by this illness can experience increased anxiety or irritability, changes in sleep or appetite, a lack of energy or feelings of extreme sadness over small changes throughout the day. In the most severe cases, some women might have thoughts of harming themselves or their baby.

"I definitely encourage women to talk to someone if they are having these types of feelings," Hammers says. That could mean a support system at home with family or friends, or a primary doctor or therapist who specializes in postpartum depression-type issues. "With good treatment and a good support system, it's something the patient can definitely recover from," Hammers says.

"My biggest tip would be to not feel like they can't talk to anyone about it," Hammers says. "Even if you aren't sure if it's postpartum depression," she adds, "my biggest recommendation is not to feel guilty or not to feel shame about the feelings you are having." //



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