

News Release

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New support group for mums

A support group for women who are suffering from depression or anxiety when having a new baby is being set up at Dorset County Hospital.

Maternity Support Worker and student midwife Charlie Francis-Pape has set up the group in an aim to support women through this difficult period in their life.

Charlie herself suffered from postnatal and antenatal depression of varying degrees when having her three daughters who are now aged two to seven.

Charlie explained why the cause is so important to her: “When a woman is having a baby you feel an expectation to be the perfect mum but when you fall short of that it makes you feel dreadful, so alone and guilty and like you are failing.

“When I had postnatal depression I really wanted someone to talk to but not just my midwife or health visitor, a friend or another Mum. I was terrified of going to mother and baby groups where I thought that everyone would judge me but I would have loved to have gone to a group with women who knew how I felt.”

Charlie now works as a volunteer with mental health charities to tell her story, in an effort to support other women to not feel alone.

She said: “Women need to know that they aren’t alone and that other women are not judging them and more importantly that it does not make them a bad mother. It is estimated that up to 20% of women suffer from some of depression or anxiety around the time that they have a new baby.”

Midwife for perinatal mental health Nicki Ellis said that the group will help to make women feel normal: “So many women have depression or anxiety around childbirth. The group will act to reduce stigma that surrounds depression and for women to know that, for some women, this can be a normal part of their pregnancy”.

Key symptoms of antenatal or postnatal anxiety or depression include; feeling down, depressed or hopeless, feeling scared and not knowing why, worrying about things too much, isolating yourself from others and no longer being able to enjoy the things that you normally like to do.

The group will be set up through the charity PANDAS, a national organisation which aims to support women who suffer from postnatal and antenatal depression.

Head of Midwifery and Neonatal Services Jo Hartley said that the PANDAS Group is an important addition to the services available for women in West Dorset: "I am so pleased that this initiative has been successful. Having a baby brings with it many mixed emotions and women need a safe, nurturing space to find support and friendship after they have given birth, particularly if they are struggling with being a mum."

The group will be available to all women who are pregnant or who have a child under one, who feel that they are depressed or anxious.

The group will be run at the Children's Centre on Damers Road, Dorchester, DT1 2LB. It takes place on a different time and day each week to allow everyone to have a chance to get to a meeting. All partners and children are also welcome.

For more information on group times and dates please visit westdorsetpandas.co.uk or call the maternity unit on 01305 254267 or speak to your midwife.

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PHOTO: Jo Hartley, Head of Midwifery and Charlie Francis-Pape, Maternity Support Worker and student midwife.

For more information please contact the DCH Communications Team on 01305 254683 or communications@dchft.nhs.uk