



Onondaga County Health Department

J. Ryan McMahon, II, County Executive
Kathryn Anderson, MD, PhD, MSPH, Commissioner of Health

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February 21st, 2023

Dear colleague,

Maternal mortality has been an issue of growing concern in the United States, with a maternal mortality ratio of 23.8 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020 and nearly 700 deaths annually. In New York State in 2018, nearly half of all deaths during pregnancy and in the one-year postpartum were associated with mental health conditions, often complicated by substance use disorders. Suicide and overdose deaths are nearly always preventable.

Research shows that as many as one in seven new mothers experience symptoms of depression. Maternal depression can have a negative impact on the mother's ability to care for her child, can reduce maternal-child bonding, and can affect the child's emotional and cognitive development.

I know that many providers are very aware of these challenges and are asking the hard questions, implementing screening like the Edinboro Postnatal Depression Screening tool and initiating pharmacotherapy or referring for cognitive behavioral therapy, but some of us are not as confident providing care to these pregnant and postpartum patients.

The New York State Office of Mental Health funds a program called Project TEACH, which provides consultations by Reproductive Psychiatrists for obstetric, pediatric, primary care and psychiatric clinicians. Consultations are available each weekday and can address important topics like appropriate medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding, as well as linkage to local support and therapy. Please see the attached information, call (716) 878-2454, email info@projectteachny.org, or visit the website at <http://www.projectteachny.org/>

I also encourage you to participate in an upcoming free virtual training event: **"Essentials of Perinatal Psychiatry: Psychopharmacology and Psychotherapy"** on Monday, March 13 from 9:00 - noon. This training will present strategies for clinicians in obstetrics, primary care, pediatrics, and psychiatry. Three CME credits are available. If this is a difficult time, please register now at <http://www.projectteachny.org/> and you will then have access to view the program at a more convenient time. See the attached announcement.

Having the knowledge to recognize and treat mood disorders in pregnant and postpartum patients can majorly impact the patient and family. As an obstetrician gynecologist, I have witnessed firsthand that maternal deaths are devastating events with profound and prolonged effects on the survivors. Let's work together to prevent these terrible outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. Alexander".

James W. Alexander, MD, MBA
Medical Director
Onondaga County Health Department