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First Lady Chirlane Mccray Delivers Remarks on Maternal Mental Health

November 17, 2015

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery



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Hello, everyone! What a wonderful day!



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We are all grateful to Bellevue and NYC Health and Hospitals for hosting us. I cannot think of a better place to announce our big and important news.

Nearby, in the Hospital Building, is Bellevue's maternity ward. Right above us, little eyes are opening for the very first time and meeting the loving gaze of their mother.

Just thinking about those first moments of mother-child connection makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. The birth of a new little person is one of the most profound and beautiful experiences that human beings can share.

But as all of the moms in this room know, giving birth is also one of life's most challenging experiences. And I'm not just talking about labor.

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During pregnancy and childbirth, a woman's body undergoes a tremendous amount of change. It can take months to regain equilibrium.

And for many mothers, the transition is especially difficult.

I am talking, of course, about postpartum depression.



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Studies suggest that at least one in every ten pregnant women and new mothers suffer from it. Here in New York City, that means 12,000 to 15,000 cases every year.



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The actual number of cases may be even higher, because studies also suggest that many women do not get treatment for maternal depression. And Black and Latina women have an even lower likelihood of starting and continuing treatment.

That's the bad news. The good news is that postpartum depression is treatable. When we treat it, we improve the lives of thousands of women each year—and we give their babies a healthier start.

Despite the great benefit it provides, screening for postpartum depression has not been part of a woman's routine care. That is why today, the City of New York is setting a big and ambitious objective.

Today, we announce our goal to screen *all* pregnant women and new mothers for postpartum depression. And if they need help, we aim to connect *all* of them to ongoing care.

This effort will begin with NYC Health and Hospitals, Maimonides Medical Center, and the Greater New York Hospitals Association.

I am so glad that all three are stepping up to this challenge.

NYC Health and Hospitals and Maimonides together deliver approximately one-quarter of all births in New York City. So they are exactly the right systems to lead on this issue.

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Both NYC Health and Hospitals and Maimonides have committed to universal screening and appropriate connection to care within two years. Universal! In two years! I think that deserves a round of applause!

And the Greater New York Hospital Association is working to bring other hospital systems on board. I think that deserves another round of applause!



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Asking for help during what is considered one of the most joyous periods in a parent's life can be daunting. No woman wants to be a bad mother. But depression, coupled with the stigma and fear of being labeled a bad mom, can keep women from reaching out for the help they need. That is why universal screening is essential.



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So many people helped us get to this day. But I want to give a special shout out to State Senator Liz Kreuger and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried for helping to pave the way with legislation that provides screening guidelines to health providers, educational materials for maternity education programs, and removes barriers to care for our mothers.

I'm also excited to work with Assembly Members Latoya Joyner and Victor Pichardo, who are both strong advocates of universal screenings and working to secure new resources for our mothers.

When it comes to changing the culture around maternal depression, and mental health in general, we need everyone to do their part.

Our work begins with the postpartum screenings we are announcing today. This is the first new initiative of Thrive NYC, our Roadmap for promoting mental health, which we will release over the next few weeks.

The Roadmap is for ALL New Yorkers. Because ALL of us are touched by mental illness – every neighborhood, every community, every borough.

And ALL of us benefit from wellness.

Thank you.

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