

Case Study #2. Women with children hospitalized after delivery

Your patient is a 21-year-old single mother. She delivered a male child (her first) at 33 weeks gestation, weighing 2300 grams. The pediatrician estimates that the child is likely to be in the Intermediate Care Nursery for 10 days to 2 weeks. She had risk factors for a low-birth-weight child that included smoking, poor nutrition, and a late start to her prenatal care. Your observations of her during pregnancy suggested that she seemed stressed and that the only social support that she had was from her mother, who accompanied her to prenatal visits and was present during the delivery. Since delivering, she has been irritable and reports feeling “on edge.” She is about ready to be discharged and you are visiting her in her room.

Questions

1. What concerns do you have about her mental well being?

She is likely to be anxious about the prospects for her child. She may be experiencing a low mood that evolves into depression. She will probably label some of this as “stress.”

2. What questions would you ask her to follow up on the possibility that she is depressed, anxious, or distressed?

You (or a nurse) could ask her to complete a brief screening tool for depression, or you could ask her a couple of question about her mood to determine if further intervention in the hospital is indicated before she is discharged. Approaches to assessment are covered in the “Assessment” module.

3. What steps could you take at this point to proactively care for this patient?

Additional possibilities include identifying a support group that is based in the hospital or the community and scheduling her follow-up visit earlier than usual—perhaps at 2 weeks rather than 6 weeks.

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