

Case Study #3. PPD affecting marital relationship

The patient is a 37-year-old primiparous woman who is back for her 6-week check-up. Both she and her husband are professionals who waited until they were established in their careers before having children. The couple lives at a great distance from their families and they have few friends who have very young children. As part of routine screening, you have determined that your patient is experiencing many symptoms of depression. The patient tells you that, since she has been married, her husband spends most of his time at work and socializing with his friends. Although she resented this behavior, she was able to immerse herself in her own work as a way of coping. The relationship problems have been exacerbated since the birth of the baby because he has continued his normal work schedule and left her the entire burden of childcare. She is about ready to return to work and cannot imagine how she will cope with work and childcare responsibilities. She is very angry with her husband and has already begun contemplating a life without him.

Questions

1. What PPD risk factors, if any, is this woman currently reporting?

Important risk factors include marital distress and a related lack of instrumental support from husband, lack of available social support from family and friends, and a demanding professional job.

2. What questions should you ask to identify any additional risk factors this woman may have?

Other important potential risk factors include a personal history of depression or anxiety disorder, history of premenstrual dysphoric disorder, problems with the baby (such as feeding or sleeping difficulties), and potential physical health problems that the patient might be experiencing.

Later sections of the STEP-PPD program will describe useful assessment methods and appropriate treatment resources and referral approaches.

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