Depression during pregnancy may lead to newborn irritability

Women who are depressed during pregnancy are more likely to have irritable newborns than are women who are not depressed during pregnancy, according to a study by researchers from the School of Medicine and Boston City Hospital. Previous studies have shown that women who are depressed after the birth of their children have less positive interactions with their children and have children who are fussier than children born to women who do not experience postpartum depression. This study, published in the October issue of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, indicates that maternal depression during pregnancy also may have negative effects on newborns.

Researchers, under the direction of principal investigator Barry Zuckerman, M.D., a professor of pediatrics, evaluated 1,123 mothers who were part of a larger study on maternal health and infant outcome. The mothers were evaluated for the presence of depressive symptoms as measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D). The infants they delivered were examined by pediatricians who measured the infants’ neurological responses, ease of consolability, level of alertness and amount of crying.

The researchers found that maternal depressive symptoms were not associated with neurologic scores or poor alertness but were significantly associated with inconsolability and excessive crying. The researchers cited three possible explanations for their findings: variables not measured in this study may have mediated the relationship between maternal depression and infant irritability; maternal hormonal changes may have affected the newborn; and women with depressive symptoms may handle and interact with their children differently in the immediate postpartum period.

Curriculum changes, endowments among topics at BUSM parents’ reception

Proposed changes in the School of Medicine’s curriculum scheduled to occur within the next two years were outlined by Dean Aram Chobanian during the School’s New England Parents’ Reception, held Oct. 7 in the Hiebert Lounge.

"The School is considering a number of changes in curriculum," the dean told the parents, students and faculty attending the reception. "Students may have fewer hours of formal lectures and more time for self-learning."

The dean also emphasized the importance of faculty recruitments and the establishment of endowed chairs. "We believe that in order to establish a tradition of excellence at the School, endowed chairs are necessary," he said. "We are looking for people to lead the School into the 21st century.

In addition, Alan Edelstein—who with his wife, Sybil, founded the Parents Committee in 1978—also addressed the group. Following the presentations and a question-and-answer period, parents were invited to tour the Student Computer Lab, which is supported in part by the Parents Committee.

Paul and Jean Rothbaum, chairpersons of the Parents Committee, hosted a reception for parents in the New York area on Nov. 4.

Children of Vietnam vets may have increased risk of birth defects

Men who served in Vietnam are more likely to father infants with one or more major birth defects than non-Vietnam veterans and men who did not serve in the military, according to a study by Ann Aschengrau, Sc.D., an assistant professor of public health (epidemiology and biostatistics) at the School of Public Health. Published in the October issue of the American Journal of Public Health, the study showed that Vietnam veterans who had combat experience and who served for longer periods of time were more likely to father children with defects than those who did not serve in Vietnam.

Compared to non-Vietnam veterans, Vietnam veterans had a 1.7-fold increased risk of fathering infants with one or more major
birth defects. The risk of defects was higher in men who had served in the Marine Corps, had longer durations of Vietnam Service, had enlisted and had initial occupational specialties in Vietnam likely to involve combat.

According to Aschengrau, no consistent patterns of defects were observed among the infants born with major malformations who were fathered by Vietnam veterans; instead, a variety of defects was noted. In addition, maternal and delivery characteristics appeared to contribute to some of the malformations, such as congenital dislocation of the hip and clubfoot.

"Our study results indicate that this issue has not yet been settled," said Aschengrau. "It will only be resolved when a study is conducted that looks specifically at Agent Orange exposure. The time frame for this is slipping away due to the half-life of Agent Orange."

New study finds fear of falling a major concern among elderly

Elderly persons are more fearful of falling than they are of other potentially fearful experiences, such as robbery or financial difficulties, according to a study conducted by researchers at the School of Public Health. The study, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in October, also found that this fear may greatly diminish the elderly's quality of life, since many older persons may limit their activities because of the fear of falling.

The researchers interviewed a random sample of elderly residents of a housing development in Brookline, Mass. Forty-one percent of the respondents said they limited their activities because of a fear of falling. Thirty-three percent reported they were very or somewhat afraid they would experience a fall during the year. When asked how often they thought about falling, 25 percent of the respondents said they thought about it daily, and 10 percent said at least once a week.

"Fear of falling not only limits independence, it also may produce a loss of muscle conditioning which weakens the muscles and increases the likelihood of falls," said Jonathon Howland, M.P.H., Ph.D., an assistant professor of public health at SPH and the principal investigator of the study.

Newberne guides Thai princess through BUSM seminar series

Paul Newberne, D.V.M., Ph.D., a professor of pathology at the School of Medicine, has been guiding the youngest daughter of the King of Thailand through an intense series of seminars at the School over the past six years. Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol, who has a doctorate in organic chemistry, originally considered pursuing a doctorate in toxicology, but Newberne advised her not to do so.

"I convinced her that an intensive and comprehensive lecture series would be a more valuable and efficient use of her limited time than a doctorate in one area," said Newberne, who has been a friend and advisor to the royal family and to the government since the 1960s when he began conducting research on mycotoxins in Thailand.

During the princess's most recent visit at the School in October, she received briefings on such topics as food toxicology, the role of nutrition in breast cancer and colon cancer, new findings in recombinant DNA technology, microbiology, and the latest information on AIDS. On Oct. 23, the Thai princess—whose official title is Professor Dr. Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol—presented a lecture on current environmental problems in Thailand and how they are being addressed. The princess believes that by educating herself as a scientist she can offer practical solutions for Thailand's health and social problems.

Medical students give free flu shots to Boston's elderly citizens

Students at the School of Medicine participated in the University Hospital's annual flu-shot program sponsored by the Home Medical Service (HMS), which provides low-income elders with medical care in their homes.

The HMS and BUSM students provided free flu shots at various locations in the Boston area during October and November. The flu vaccine for this program is provided by the City of Boston Department of Health and Hospitals as part of its annual citywide immunization program.

"The [flu-shot] program provides medical students with their first opportunity to become involved in community care and shows them the importance of providing health education and service to the elderly," said Anna Bissonnette, R.N., M.S., an assistant professor of socio-medical sciences and community medicine, the associate director of HMS and the organizer of the flu-shot program.

Faculty members present abstracts at Academy of Pediatrics meeting

Faculty members from the Schools of Medicine and Public Health recently presented abstracts at the 59th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Pediatrics held Oct. 5-10 in Boston.

The presentations included: "Failure to Thrive," Deborah Frank, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics and an assistant professor of public health; "Otitis Media-New Perspectives," Jerome Klein, M.D., a professor of pediatrics; "New Reproductive Technologies: Ethical, Social and Policy Concerns," Michael Grodin, M.D., Ph.D., the director of the Medical Ethics Programs at BUSM and SPH and an associate professor of pediatrics and public health.

Other presentations were: "Crack Babies: The Innocent Victims," Barry Zuckerman, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics and public health, George Annas, J.D., M.P.H., a professor of health law, and Grodin; "Community and School-based Care for Children with Chronic Illness," Michael Weitzman, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics and public health; and "The Current Status of Maternal Screenings for
The School of Medicine held its annual Affiliated Hospitals Dinner on Oct. 30 at the St. Botolph Club in Boston. Pictured at the dinner are, left to right, David Marcello, M.D., a clinical professor of surgery and chief of surgery at Brockton Hospital; Edward Spatz, M.D., a clinical professor of neurosurgery and surgeon-in-chief of the University Hospital; Joel Alpert, M.D., chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the School and at Boston City Hospital; and John O'Connor, M.D., a professor of pediatrics and radiology, associate dean of admissions and chief of radiology at BCH. (photo by Louis Martin)


Amaro appointed to the Board of Regents of Higher Education

Hortensia de los Angeles Amaro, Ph.D., an associate professor of social and behavioral sciences at the School of Public Health, recently accepted an appointment by Governor Michael S. Dukakis to the Board of Regents of Higher Education. Amaro, one of three newly appointed members, is the first Hispanic ever to serve on the board. The regents govern the 27 public colleges and universities in Massachusetts and oversee a $600-million state budget.

As a member of the Board of Regents, Amaro will oversee all of the policy, planning and budgetary issues pertaining to all public institutions of higher education throughout Massachusetts. In addition, she will work with the other board members to conduct long- and short-term planning on academic, student and personnel issues.

Amaro is especially interested in formulating programs that will improve the access to health professions by black and Hispanic students. "There is an acute shortage of health professionals who represent and serve minority communities," said Amaro. "We need to increase the number of black and Hispanic health-care professionals as well as improve the quality of educational programs offered to health-care professionals who work in minority communities in order to improve their understanding of these communities."

Weiner honored with establishment of an annual award in her name

The New England Regional Meeting of National Association for Perinatal Addiction, Research and Education (NAPARE) recently honored Lyn Weiner, M.P.H., an associate professor of psychiatry, by establishing an annual award in her name. Weiner, who also is executive director of the Fetal Alcohol Education Program, was honored for her pioneering research and continuing commitment to the treatment of alcohol-dependent women and their children. Weiner serves as an advocate for treatment for addicted, pregnant women and is initiating new research to understand the needs of alcohol- and drug-affected children. The Lyn Weiner Award will recognize organizations that work toward preventing alcohol-related birth defects.

Stengel appointed chairperson-elect of government relations organization

Elizabeth Bell Stengel, director of Government Relations at the School of Medicine, recently was elected chairperson-elect of the national Government Relations Representatives Group (GRP). Stengel will become chairperson for one year beginning in September 1991. The GRP is composed of about 500 government relations personnel who handle issues of medical research, education, and teaching-hospital and academic physician-payment policies. It is a coalition of the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Association of American Universities, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.

Miller awarded grant to conduct substance abuse training

Laurence H. Miller, M.D., an associate clinical professor of psychiatry and director of the Division of Psychiatry at Boston City Hospital, has been awarded a grant for Clinical Training in Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Miller will provide leadership to four junior faculty fellows in enhancing their own educations in substance abuse and pedagogical methods as well as in developing specific substance abuse curricula for their departments.

The four junior faculty fellows who will work with Miller are: Lily Awad, M.D., a staff psychiatrist for the Consultation and Liaison Service at BCH; Edward Bernstein, M.D., an associate professor of public health (social and behavioral sciences, and socio-medical sciences) and community medicine (emergency medicine); Linda Grant, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine; and Jeffrey Samet, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine.
Hutner receives two-year award
Nancy Hutner, Ph.D., an instructor of psychiatry (neuropsychology), recently received a National Research Service Award from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. This two-year award, which provides $21,000 the first year and approximately $30,000 the second year, will support Hutner’s research into functional brain asymmetries in alcoholism and aging.

Briefly Noted
At the Annual Meeting of the American College of Surgeons in San Francisco, Barry Manuel, M.D., associate dean for continuing education, directed and moderated a three-day post-graduate course on "Risk Management and Legal Preparedness." At the same meeting, Manuel gave a formal presentation to the College on "Future Trends in Professional Liability." Ellen Cooper, M.D., an assistant professor of pediatrics, presented an educational lecture titled "AIDS and Children: A Challenge to Society" to the Friends of Hospice at Home on Sept. 26. Norman Levinsky, M.D., a professor of medicine at BUSM and physician-in-chief at the University Hospital, participated in an open forum on "Economics and Care of the Dying" on Oct. 25 sponsored by the Hastings Center. Levinsky discussed the clinical perspectives of caring for the terminally ill.

Upcoming CME courses
The Department of Continuing Medical Education is offering the following courses:
"Current Clinical Pediatrics" will be held from Dec. 28-30 at the Buena Vista Palace at Walt Disney World Village, Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
"Uro-oncology Update 1991" will take place at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Boston on Jan. 12.
"Advanced Trauma Life Support" will be held on Jan. 17-18 at Boston University Medical Center.
For more information contact the Department of Continuing Medical Education at 638-4605 (4605).

News & Notes is a publication of the Office of Publication Services. If you have news of interest to the BUSM community, please contact Angela Sullivan, x8482 (638-8482) or write to her at the Office of Publication Services, 80 East Concord Street, Robinson 7 (B-7), Boston, MA 02118.