Addressing Caregiver Depression in Pediatric Primary Care in 200 Words

Behavioral Health

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Depressive symptoms are a reality for up to 50 percent of mothers with young children. Those symptoms can also significantly impact their children, as depressed parents are less likely to engage in positive parenting practices.

In 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed maternal depression screening in pediatric settings. Considering the impact that a mother's mental health can have on her child's health and the frequency of check-ups during infancy, these visits provide opportunities not only for screening, but also intervention.

To test the feasibility of maternal depression screening, we, along with our colleagues Drs. Rhonda Boyd and Marsha Gerdes, conducted a large-scale study that embedded screening questions and alerts into electronic health records used during well-child visits. The researchers found that the alerts increased how often pediatricians screened for maternal depression. Pediatricians also reported that using the simple two-question screen helped improve their clinical skills and, most importantly, the relationships they had with families.

Although it is a crucial first step, screening on its own is not enough. Multiple studies have shown that providing individuals with direct connections to local mental health resources reduces their depressive symptoms. Closer ties between doctors and mental health professionals may facilitate access to mental health resources for mothers who screen positive for depressive symptoms and provide them the care they need to ensure healthy lives for their children.

For more information on our study and how pediatricians can more effectively screen and provide interventions for caregivers experiencing depression, be sure to check out the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Primary Care Perspectives Podcast below.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Communications Manager Lauren Walens.

James Guevara
James Guevara
MD, MPH
Faculty Member