

# Spotting mental illness in new mothers

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A new on-line tool and DVD developed by University experts to help midwives identify and treat new mothers at risk of severe mental illness has been officially launched by the Chief Nursing Officer for Wales and Honorary Visiting University Professor, Jean White.

*Maternal [Mental Health](#): A learning Programme for Midwives*, has been designed by the All-Wales Perinatal Mental Health Group led by a team from the University's Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Midwifery.

Central to the new learning module is all healthcare professionals involved in antenatal and postnatal care asking key questions to help predict, as well as detect, those [women](#) at risk of severe mental illness during pregnancy and childbirth.

"Some years ago the World Health Organization proposed that there is no health without mental health," said Dr Ian Jones, School of Medicine,

and member of the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) hosted by Cardiff University, who led the development of the training module.

"Suicide is a leading cause of maternal death in the UK and it is vital that women at high risk of severe mental illness at this time are identified so that appropriate help can be given to help keep them well.

"The mental health and well-being of women in pregnancy is pivotal to ensuring good clinical, social and psychological outcomes for both mother and baby and provide a healthy start to family life.

"In view of this, it is essential that mental health is a central component of midwifery care – which is the primary motivation in developing this new on-line learning tool," he added.

The module covers a variety of different subject areas including: commonly held beliefs about mental health and pregnancy; characteristics of those women most at risk of severe mental illness; help for health care professionals to ask questions about a person's mental health in the right way and then how to interpret the answers; and when to refer women for more help.

"By developing this new learning programme our aim is to provide the essentials that midwives and, indeed, all healthcare professionals need to identify those women at risk of severe [mental illness](#) in the postnatal period or following pregnancy," according to Grace Thomas, School of Nursing and Midwifery, and Consultant Midwife at the Aneurin Bevan Health Board.

"By providing these essential skills we hope to ensure that women will receive timely advice, referral and treatment and access to skilled appropriate care."

The new module available contains a series of on-line resources including videos and learning materials which can be accessed at any time, helping busy midwives and students to fit their training around their working day, as well as being a valuable resource in group and workshop education sessions.

The Chief Nursing Officer for Wales, Professor Jean White and Honorary Visiting University Professor, has been monitoring the progress of the toolkit and welcomes its on-line accessibility.

Professor White said: "Having a baby is a wonderful experience, but for some mothers it can be an overwhelming one. Asking the right questions could mean the difference between a new mum feeling isolated and alone or receiving the help she needs.

"As an on-line resource, it is invaluable. Students, and indeed midwives and other health professionals with many years of experience, can review this training module and make sure they have the tools and understanding to address an individual mother's level of need."

Helen Rogers, Royal College of Midwives, Director for Wales, said: "The mental health of pregnant and postnatal women is too often neglected and overlooked, so this initiative is a major and positive step.

"There is a real need to raise awareness of this issue among midwives and other health professionals and this toolkit will go a long way towards achieving this. It is so important that we get the support and services in place for women, because the consequences of failing to do so can be disastrous."

The training module is available to view on-line at:  
[www.beatingbipolar.org/perinataltraining/](http://www.beatingbipolar.org/perinataltraining/)

Provided by Cardiff University

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