

Coverage of DC Chase Speaks to National Local Need to Address Postpartum Depression

Written by Australian Business

LOS ANGELES, CA, October 09, 2013 **/24-7PressRelease/** -- Media coverage surrounding the death of Miriam Casey, the 34-year old women who drove her car with her one-year old baby into police barricades near the White House on Thursday, has stated that she was suffering from postpartum depression. While we do not have access to her medical records, this tragedy and the media's response speaks to the urgent need to address maternal mental health issues at both the national and local levels.

"What we have known for some time is that the mental health needs of pregnant and new mothers are not being addressed adequately. We must work with systems, organizations and individuals who are providing care to mothers and families during pregnancy and the postpartum period so that perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are identified and addressed in a timely and culturally appropriate manner," states Caron Post, PhD, Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force.

Postpartum depression is one of many mood and anxiety disorders that affect women and families during pregnancy and around the time of birth. Left untreated, maternal depression can lead to long-term depression in the mother, a lack of emotional availability for the baby and detrimental outcomes in the development of the fetus, newborn and developing child. Postpartum psychosis, in which there is a severe break in reality, is NOT an extreme form of postpartum depression. Postpartum psychosis is an illness completely separate from other kinds of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. It is an extremely rare life-threatening medical emergency, occurring in only 1-2% of births. It often features delusions and hallucinations.

"Women who are suffering from any kind of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are not threats to our national safety. Rather, their symptoms impact those that are closest to them - their partners, family, friends and their babies," Dr. Post says.

Although this tragedy occurred in Washington DC, similar incidents take place in Los Angeles every year. According to the 2010 Los Angeles Mommy & Baby survey, 51% of new mothers reported feelings of depression during the postpartum period. Rates are highest amongst women living in poverty as well as amongst Hispanic (52.1%) and African American (49.1%) women. Yet, only 36.5% of women reported being asked about depression or anxiety by a healthcare provider at a postpartum visit.

The Los Angeles County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force (MaternalMentalHealthLA.org) is working to improve systems of care for pregnant and postpartum women across Los Angeles County. The organization trains health care and community organizations that interact with new moms and moms-to-be to screen, refer and treat perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. It

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distributes informational material and hosts educational events to reduce stigma associated with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. It also works at a local and statewide level to ensure that all women have access to treatment through its policy and advocacy activities. Finally, the Task Force is piloting the first of its kind project in which maternal mental health care is embedded in a family medicine setting in partnership with USC-Eisner Family Medicine Clinic.

The tragic circumstances surrounding Miriam Casey's death speak to the urgent need to address mental health disorders surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. "We, as a nation, owe it to her child to find out what truly happened and help other women who are struggling with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders," states Dr. Post.

If you think you or a loved one is suffering from a perinatal mood and anxiety disorder, please speak to your healthcare provider or contact Postpartum Support International at 1.855.277.7462. In Los Angeles, you can call 211.

The mission of the Los Angeles County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force is to remove the barriers to prevention, screening and treatment of prenatal and postpartum depression in Los Angeles County.