UNH Researcher Publishes Two Books On Depression In Mothers

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National Depression Screening Day is Oct. 6

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DURHAM, N.H. -- For more than a decade Kathleen Kendall-Tackett has been a sought-after speaker around the world on postpartum depression, and every year she thinks it will be the last.

“The World Health Organization says depression is responsible for 28 percent of disability worldwide and there is starting to be more recognition of it as a problem,” says the University of New Hampshire health psychologist, “but we still tend to trivialize depression, especially in new mothers. We have this idea that it’s a white middle class thing, that minority or teen mothers don’t have time to get depressed, and that simply isn’t true.”

According to Kendall-Tackett, who recently published two books on the topic, as much as 20 percent of new mothers experience depression and, if not identified, it can go on for years.

Thursday, Oct. 6, 2005, is National Depression Screening Day; visit http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/ for a list of sites providing free screening.

“We need to get depression out into the open, stop shrouding the topic in secrecy,” says Kendall-Tackett, who chairs the New Hampshire Breastfeeding Task Force. “Motherhood can be one of life’s most rewarding experiences, but it can also be one of the most challenging. Depression is so common in new mothers that the American Psychological Association considers being a mother of young children a risk factor for depression.”

In addition, many women don’t seek out treatment because they think it means they’ll have to stop breastfeeding. Kendall-Tackett debunks that myth. That’s why her book, The Hidden Feelings of Motherhood, is an invaluable resource for new mothers. A new edition features updated information and a new chapter on the impact of birth on depression.

Research shows depression in the mother can impact a child’s behavior and IQ through early adolescence, and a new study found that breastfeeding can actually protect a baby from the harmful effects of depression.

Kendall-Tackett’s second book, Depression in New Mothers: Causes, Consequences and Treatment Options, is a summary of about 700 articles from around the world on the topic for
professionals working in the field of maternal and child health.

“Doctors still tend to treat breastfeeding as optional,” she said, “but there are so many treatment choices available now that women shouldn’t be suffering, and they shouldn’t have to make a choice between treatment for depression and breastfeeding.”