

Few Physicians Screen for Postpartum Depression

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WASHINGTON — Only 9% of 276 physicians surveyed use standardized screening measures to assess patients for postpartum depression, reported Randy Fingerhut, Ph.D., in a poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

Previous studies have shown that as many as 50% of all cases of postpartum de-

pression remain undetected by physicians, wrote Dr. Fingerhut and his colleagues at La Salle University in Philadelphia.

The study included 95 obstetricians and 181 pediatricians based in Pennsylvania.

Overall, 77% of obstetricians reported screening patients for postpartum depression prenatally, and 93% screened postnatally. By contrast, only 47% of pediatricians reported assessing mothers for postpartum depression.

The physicians completed the Postpar-

tum Depression Survey, which asks true/false questions about postpartum depression, and the Postpartum Screening and Assessment Questionnaire, which includes questions about physician procedures for handling cases of postpartum depression.

A slight majority (58%) of the physicians estimated that 0%-10% of their patients experienced postpartum depression, which is lower than the 10%-20% shown in previous studies. This discrepancy may

be attributable to the infrequent use of a standard screening method, the investigators noted. The physicians reported a range of interventions, including medication and psychotherapy, and most believed that medication was superior to psychotherapy for postpartum depression.

Although only 11% of the physicians considered themselves to be "extremely knowledgeable" about postpartum depression, 87% said they were interested in learning more about the condition. ■

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