Red flags for GPs in perinatal mental health

History of mental illness

Women with Bipolar Disorder

Risk

- More than one in five risk of suffering from postnatal psychosis.
- Almost one in two risk of experiencing severe postnatal depression.
- One in two for women with a history of previous postnatal psychosis.
- One in two with bipolar disorder and a family history of postnatal psychosis.

Management

- Refer to a psychiatrist, preferably a specialist perinatal in pregnancy, even if they are well, so a personalised care plan can be made.
- Postpartum psychosis is a psychiatric emergency and requires specialist assessment and treatment within 4 hours.
- 50% of women who get postnatal psychosis have no history of mental health problems.

Women with severe depression

- 40% risk of subsequent postnatal and non-postnatal relapse.

Detection

- If a woman consults a GP saying she thinks she has a perinatal mental health problem, she is almost certainly right. Do not dismiss her or normalise her symptoms.

Presentations which should prompt urgent senior psychiatric assessment

- Recent significant change in mental state or emergence of new symptoms.
- New thoughts or acts of violent self-harm.
- New and persistent expressions of incompetency as a mother or estrangement from the infant.

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