

Death of Postpartum Psychosis Survivor

September 3, 2015

Phoenix, Arizona

Naomi Knoles of Phoenix, AZ ended her suffering on Monday, August 24 following a battle against intractable depression and grief. The loss of this gentle, shining soul has been another crushing defeat for women's mental health supporters and experts.

Naomi started her campaign to lessen the suffering of mothers in late 2013 after her release from an AZ Department of Corrections facility in Goodyear, AZ following a 10 year sentence for the death of her infant daughter Anna. A sufferer of postpartum psychosis, Naomi falsely believed that she was a bad mother, and overwhelmed with the prospect that Anna deserved more than she could provide, came to believe that taking her own life was the solution. In a psychotic state following the unsuccessful suicide attempt, she put a pillow over the face of her baby.

In her efforts to make meaning of her tragedy and to serve others, Naomi became involved in AZ based Coalitions and Postpartum Support International (PSI). On April 2014, the Northwest Medical Center of Tucson, AZ hosted the Tucson Postpartum Depression Coalition gathering where Naomi spoke publicly for the first time in an address she named, "We All Have A Story To Tell." She etched a lasting impression on the hearts and minds of 60 attendees. *If this lovely, intelligent and gentle woman could take the life of her baby, this might happen to anyone.*- And indeed, maternal mental illness can strike anywhere.

In remembering Naomi and honoring her dreams, we need to continue to build clearly accessible avenues of support in every community. Each agency must take its part in creating programs that screen, educate and provide resources for mothers so that perinatal mood and anxiety (PMAD) does not lead to the depth of depression from which recovery seems beyond reach.

Each agency and physician must talk about reproductive mental health with preconception, pregnant and postpartum women. When a mom calls for an appointment, *listen*, be empathic, and find a way to serve this woman. Perinatal women who finally make that call are easily disheartened by disengaged or unknowledgeable staff. Teach your staff that this woman might be a statistic if she is turned away.

Providers often report that they don't screen because the mental health services in Arizona are inaccessible or lacking. While this perceived barrier leads to lost opportunities to identify women at risk, the community is frustrated by the obstacles between need and care- 20% OF WOMEN (1 OUT OF 5) SUFFER WITH PERINATAL DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY.

Here's what you can do: SCREEN! The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale is a 10 item risk assessment both free and easily completed and scored. EDUCATE! Give every pregnant and postpartum woman a brochure about perinatal mood disorders. They are FREE! REFER! AZ Warmline can help a provider or mom find local resources: 888-434-MOMS. ADVOCATE! Encourage the Regional Behavioral Health Authority and the Department of Behavioral Health to create protocols, policies and services that address perinatal mood disorders.

The death of this young woman who appeared to have "turned the corner" is a tragedy that didn't have to happen. The simple steps of screening, education and referral might have preserved two lives. We need to wake up. Women are dying.

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Carole Sheehan MA, RN

President, Tucson Postpartum Depression Coalition

520-631-6308

Carole_sheehan@hotmail.com

www.tucsonpostpartum.com