

Intranet carousel, newsletter brief



Acknowledging trauma histories of vulnerable patients improves care

Imagine being afraid to receive care for your unborn child. Learn how a group of Providence caregivers are working with one of our most vulnerable populations – new mothers struggling with substance use disorders.

[SEE THEIR STORY »](#)

Intranet announcement: news

Team: Acknowledging trauma histories of vulnerable patients improves care

Aug. 15, 2019

PROVIDENCE MEDICAL GROUP – Trauma, experienced either currently or historically, can drastically influence the care experience a patient has, and their ability to engage in health care services. A group of Providence caregivers is taking special consideration of the prevalence of trauma when working with one of our most vulnerable populations – expectant mothers living with substance use disorder.

Project Nurture, a collaborative team based out of Providence Medical Group-Milwaukie, is blazing a trail for trauma-informed care. The services that they provide in both inpatient and outpatient settings for expectant mothers struggling with substance abuse are built on the principles of this care strategy in order to establish safe and trusting relationships.

“We are accepting women where they are at, offering them the care that they are ready to receive and gently encouraging them to achieve their goals,” says Josh Reagan, M.D., with Project Nurture.

How trauma informs care

Trauma results from an event or set of circumstances someone perceives as physically or emotionally harmful. This can have a lasting negative effect on the person’s ability to function in life, and on mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

People with substance use disorder frequently have a history of trauma. This trauma can include childhood abuse or neglect, an incarcerated household member, domestic violence, PTSD, and more.

The techniques implemented when treating people who have experienced trauma is called trauma-informed care. This approach recognizes that the difficulties displayed by patients reflect the trauma that has occurred during their lives. By altering caregiving practices in a way that makes space for the trauma, Project Nurture caregivers hope to prevent further medical trauma as a result of seeking medical care.

The Project Nurture team, from left: Kasey Edwards, doula and recovery mentor; Rebecca Rourke, LPC, chemical dependency counselor; Josh Reagan, M.D., primary care physician; and Diana Banks, medical assistant.



We are all human

The Project Nurture team works to maintain family structures, treat addiction and increase the chance of successful parenting for this vulnerable population of moms. A major way this is accomplished is through seeing the humanity in every patient and listening to what they are saying without assumptions.

“There is this perception that women with substance use disorder are drug seeking, that their goal is to get high. We try to not make this a battle. When they are in pain, we respect them and try to treat that pain in a manner that feels okay to them,” says Josh.

Kasey Edwards, a specialized doula and recovery mentor with Project Nurture, reflects on the experience of her patients.

“The stigma of being a pregnant woman who uses drugs and having a baby who may be impacted by opioid withdrawal, makes the population that we serve really special and specific,” says Kasey.

Due to the unique life experiences of their patients, which frequently includes a history of trauma, the Project Nurture team tries even harder to have clear and open communication with nurses and social workers to ensure that patients feel comfortable, respected and cared for.

The Oregon Department of Human Services is often in contact with both the expectant mothers and the Project Nurture team to address the safety of the child. This interaction can be incredibly sensitive and worrisome to the patients, thus Kasey works

closely with the new mothers to help them advocate for themselves and understand their options.

“Start looking beyond people’s appearance and actually start hearing what they are saying. That’s how we stop hurting people in the medical system,” says Kasey.

What’s next?

Project Nurture however is not just about delivering care in the moment, but rather creating a lasting effect.

“I am really hopeful that if we can help break the cycle these women are in, we can make a difference for future generations. It’s very much a collaborative approach towards helping them realize their own goals,” says Josh.

Learn more

If you would like more education on trauma-informed care for your team, please contact [Ann Kirby](#).

For more information on trauma in childhood, substance use and mental health, read this article from American Journal of Preventive Medicine: [Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Risk of Premature Mortality](#).