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## **October is Depression Awareness Month: How Can a Motivational Exercise or Wellness Program Effect Postpartum Depression?**

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*Minneapolis, Minnesota*—October is National Depression Awareness Month. Within general depression, there is a need to increase awareness for postpartum depression. Approximately 15% of new mothers experience depression and an even larger percentage report anxiety and/or depressive symptoms. Because less than 10% of women with postpartum depression seek traditional treatments such as antidepressant medication and psychotherapy, there is a need for innovative strategies to prevent postpartum depression.

Dr. Beth Lewis, an Associate Professor of Kinesiology, licensed psychologist, and affiliated scholar of **The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport** at the University of Minnesota is at the forefront of innovative research focusing on postpartum depression. Dr. Lewis published a study this year examining telephone-based interventions designed to prevent postpartum depression. Postpartum women (average was five weeks, six days) who had a history of depression or their mother had a history of depression were randomly assigned to receive an exercise or wellness intervention. The exercise intervention consisted of 11 telephone sessions delivered by trained counselors who used motivational strategies designed to increase exercise. The wellness intervention also consisted of 11 telephone sessions but these sessions focused on stress reduction, improvement in sleep, and better nutrition. Results indicated that 8% of participants in both study groups developed postpartum depression, which was significantly less than what was anticipated for this at risk group of postpartum women.

Dr. Lewis states that, "It is important to find low cost strategies that can reach a large number of postpartum women. Prevention is preferable to treatment because once postpartum depression has been diagnosed, the mother has already experienced the negative consequences of postpartum depression such as a lack of infant bonding and an increased risk of depression in the future." Dr. Lewis continues to say that, "More and more employer groups are beginning to offer free telephone-based sessions that focus on improving health and we believe our intervention could potentially be offered within this setting as a strategy for decreasing postpartum depression."

Dr. Lewis is currently delivering another study examining the effect of exercise and wellness on mood following childbirth. The study, known as the **Healthy Mom II Program**, is seeking women who are currently pregnant or are less than 6 weeks postpartum to participate in the study. Participants receive a motivational exercise program or a health and wellness program delivered via the telephone, which begins after the birth of their baby. Participants must not take an antidepressant, but must have a history of depression. Participants receive \$100 for their time (for more information call 612-625-9753, text 612-345-0325, or email [mompro@umn.edu](mailto:mompro@umn.edu)).

