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Occupational Therapy’s Role in Maternal Mental Health within Transition from NICU to Home
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BACKGROUND
Maternal mental health describes women’s health during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (Podvey, 2018). The transition to motherhood is often led with optimistic expectations, yet studies have shown that postnatal experiences that do not match mothers prenatal expectations can have a large impact on the development of postnatal depression (Lazarus & Rossouw, 2015). Up to 20% of pregnant or postpartum women experience perinatal mood disorders, including postpartum depression (PPD), perinatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and postpartum anxiety, which negatively affect daily function during pregnancy and the post-birth year (Vismara, 2017).

PURPOSE
To identify occupational therapy’s role in maternal mental health following transition home from a NICU setting.

Outcome Objectives:
(a) Build rapport with families through observations in an early intervention program serving infants and young children.
(b) Complete a needs assessment to assess the occupational needs of mothers during the transition from the NICU through observation, interviews with families and therapists, and semi-structured assessment.
(c) Formulate and deliver a questionnaire for mothers to determine how their occupations are impacted.
(d) Conduct interviews to compare the differences in roles, routines, and environment post transition home from the NICU.
(e) Develop and propose a program that addresses occupational performance challenges of early motherhood, including the complexities of establishing healthy roles, routines, and coping strategies from assessment results to promote positive maternal mental health.
(f) Propose the developed program to the families, Stars Therapy Services, and to the OT profession at large.

METHODS
Data analysis for this capstone project consisted of a thematic analysis through a needs assessment by identifying common themes and concepts derived from mothers’ lived responses (Lydcott et al., 2019). By analyzing the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) consisting of 10 questions that can be completed in less than 5 minutes. Responses range from 0,1,2 and 3 according to the severity of the symptom. The total score of 30 points is determined by adding together the scores from 10 questions. Validation studies determined women scoring 9 or above were at risk for possible depression within a week of being discharged home from the NICU. Up to 20% of pregnant or postpartum women experience perinatal mood disorders, including postpartum depression (PPD), perinatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and postpartum anxiety, which negatively affect daily function during pregnancy and the post-birth year (Vismara, 2017).

THEMES
Feeding and Sleep Routine
• “Trying to stay on a feeding routine and overcome the challenges of breastfeeding alone became the number one stressor throughout my day. Eventually, I had to give up believe I couldn’t do it anymore. Breastfeeding took over my life, not in a good way.”
• “I wish I would have had help and the resources to establish a sleep routine. There were some days I was running on 2 hours of sleep, and it started to affect my mood and how I treated people. I was so worried about my baby getting enough sleep that I did not focus on myself, because it wasn’t about my needs anymore.”

Self Care
• “What is self-care when you’re a new mother to a baby who needs 24/7 Support? Before I had my baby, I would love to paint my nails, spend 30 minutes in the shower washing my hair, and the occasional one a week face mask. Now my showers consist of 10 minutes at most. I don’t remember the last time I did my self-care routine.”
• “Before I had my baby, we had the house where everyone would hang out at. When I brought my baby home, I didn’t see my friends anymore. I was nervous for people to come over because my baby was so little. It was hard to relate to other friends because they do not have children. I became lonely at times and wanted to find a mom group but was not sure how.”

Social and Leisure Participation
• “I wanted my home environment to be like the NICU and limit external stressors. I became angry when the neighbors were loud, and dogs were constantly barking. Sometimes it was a battle to maintain the temperature, lights and noise within my home with other people.”
• “My home environment was organized chaos. It was busy, messy and hectic due to dirty dishes and laundry everywhere. We just had to learn sometimes to embrace the mess and make a priority list.”

Home Environment
• “I had to be trained on the APNEA monitor, make respiratory, eye exam, pediatrician, and my OB/GYN. I needed to make sure my baby was working towards reaching typical developmental milestones. It became very overwhelming at times when the neighbors were loud, and dogs were constantly barking. Sometimes it was a battle to maintain the temperature, lights and noise within my home with other people.”
• “My environment was organized chaos. It was busy, messy and hectic due to dirty dishes and laundry everywhere. We just had to learn sometimes to embrace the mess and make a priority list.”

Home Management
• “It is difficult to manage the first nine months. It was exhausting adjusting to my baby being home. I had to be trained on the APNEA monitor, make sure my baby had PT and OT appointments once a week each. Numerous doctor appointments for respiratory, eye exam, pediatrician, and my OB/GYN. I needed to make sure my baby was working towards reaching typical developmental milestones. It became very overwhelming at times when the neighbors were loud, and dogs were constantly barking. Sometimes it was a battle to manage my time more.”

Medical Management
• “I had to be trained on the APNEA monitor, make sure my baby had PT and OT appointments once a week each. Numerous doctor appointments for respiratory, eye exam, pediatrician, and my OB/GYN. I needed to make sure my baby was working towards reaching typical developmental milestones. It became very overwhelming at times when the neighbors were loud, and dogs were constantly barking. Sometimes it was a battle to manage my time more.”

REFERENCES

