



News Release

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For Immediate Release

VIRTUA HEALTH, SOUTH JERSEY'S LARGEST PROVIDER OF COMPREHENSIVE WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES, HELPS MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES AVOID POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION TRAGEDIES

Voorhees, NJ, November 9, 2004—Just after the birth of her third daughter, Sue Wilder, 34, of Evesham, felt ashamed that she “just couldn’t bond” with her new baby. Sue remembers, “I didn’t want to be alone with her, and I couldn’t stop crying.”

Because Sue delivered her daughter at Virtua Health, she knew where to turn for help.

At Virtua, where more than 7,400 babies are delivered annually, inpatient mothers are informed of the early warning signs of postpartum depression (PPD) and offered a voluntary screening to determine whether they might be at risk.

One of the first hospitals state-wide to offer these free, voluntary PPD screenings within one day of delivery, Virtua is able to follow up with mothers who, once discharged, might be candidates for additional resources. These range from Virtua’s weekly Talking, Listening & Caring for Moms (TLC) support group, to referrals for psychiatrists who can evaluate whether medication and further treatment is necessary.

Barb Johannes, LPN, coordinator for the PPD program believes that mothers who deliver at Virtua are “more likely to talk about their symptoms” and seek help because of Virtua’s multi-layered approach: “At Virtua, our childbirth educators are talking about PPD in childbirth and baby-care classes. The nurses are teaching our patients about the signs and symptoms of PPD prior to their discharge. The obstetricians are screening for PPD at the six week postpartum check up.”

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The program helps mothers and their families understand that up to 80 percent of women are apt to experience mild depression and feelings of “let down” after delivery. These so-called “baby blues” tend to pass, leaving mother and baby to bond as expected. The remaining 20 percent of women continue to experience postpartum depression (PPD) symptoms such as inability to concentrate, feelings of worthlessness, lack of appetite, uncontrollable weeping and little interest in their baby.

Without help, these symptoms can leave mothers vulnerable to acting out in ways they might never have thought possible, including shaking their babies or worse. It can also leave them with an inability to bond with their babies, which can lead to long-term developmental issues in these children.

By providing this information, Virtua is helping women and their physicians become more comfortable discussing PPD, so that treatment is possible and potential tragedies are avoided.

With the exception of the screening program, Virtua’s PPD services are also provided to the community at large: women who delivered their babies at facilities other than Virtua but who suspect they might have PPD are urged to call 1-888-Virtua-3 (1-888-847-8823).

Today, with the help of medication, as well as the support of her family and of the other women Sue has met in the TLC group, this mother of three says she “feels like myself again” and is now happily bonded with her daughter.

Virtua Health, the largest healthcare provider in South Jersey, is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing the highest quality health care to the communities it serves. With more than 7,400 employees and 1,700 physicians, Virtua Health is comprised of four hospitals including Virtua Memorial Hospital Burlington County, Mt. Holly, and Virtua West Jersey Hospitals in Berlin, Marlton and Voorhees. More than 7,300 babies are born annually at Virtua's hospitals in Mt. Holly and Voorhees where maternal fetal medicine and comprehensive neonatal intensive care for premature newborns is provided. A wide range of world-class pediatric specialty care is offered through the Virtua/duPont Children's Health Program, an affiliation with the A.I. duPont Hospital for Children. The Fox Chase Virtua Health Cancer Program provides comprehensive cancer treatment, the latest technology, and access to national and regional cancer treatment and prevention studies. Additional programs of excellence also include orthopedics, neurosurgery and cardiology services. With five strategically located emergency centers, Virtua handles more emergencies - and more pediatric emergencies - than any other health system in South Jersey. Virtua also serves the community with comprehensive primary care and emergency services at its outpatient center in Camden; two long-term comprehensive care centers in Berlin and Mt. Holly; two outpatient surgery centers in Mt. Holly and Voorhees; a home-health care agency and the William G. Rohrer Center for HealthFitness in Voorhees. Information about Virtua Health is available at 1-888-VIRTUA-3 (1-888-847-8823) and on the Internet at www.virtua.org.

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