Top Tips for Effective Communication in Perinatal Mental Health:

**Anticipate & assess risk** - PMH of MH problems should trigger planning for support antenatally

**Explore expectations** – the initial booking consultation is an important time to gauge feelings about motherhood, her own childhood and what she is expecting so help teach resilience.

**Be aware of your own prejudice** - Lose your preconceived ideas about what ‘depressed/anxious/ill’ looks like - the symptoms and signs are not always obvious.

**Beware of stigma** – perinatal mental health illness does not discriminate – it can and does affect anyone including partners, health professionals and women of all backgrounds

**Acknowledge** – it takes courage to seek help for mental health problems and will have taken a lot for a woman to come to see you in the first place

**Listen don’t just hear** – look out for hesitation or pause, read non-verbal cues and notice what is not said, sometimes this is as important as what is actually said

**Open the door to disclosure** - “Is motherhood everything you thought it would be?”

**Reassure** - This is not her fault; she is not alone; she will get better. If she is concerned about the involvement of social services, advise her the risk of separation from her baby is extremely unlikely.

**Encourage discussion** - allow her to talk about her feelings and listen without judgment.

**Promote self-care** – encourage her to take time for herself. Breaks are a necessity; fatigue is a major contributing factor to worsening symptoms

**Offer hope** – there is effective, evidence based treatment for perinatal mental health - women can and do get better

Comments from women with lived experience & professionals who work with them taken from #PNDHour (weekly Twitter chat on Wednesday 8-9pm):

- “I think people don’t always realise that depression takes many forms & there are other perinatal mental health issues too.”
- “I think it’s hard to know when it’s appropriate to seek help. If you are not “depressed” but are struggling for example.”
- “Asking for help takes immense courage & is a sign of great strength not weakness. So important to recognise this.”
- “Help is be hard to ask for, with shame and stigma attached to mental health. Reaching out is a triumph.”

Compiled by Dr Sweta Raj & Dr Carrie Ladd, July 2016