

Magee Offers Hope to Opiate-Addicted Mothers

Recognizing substance abuse as a chronic medical condition, Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC has established a defined process for caring for opiate-addicted pregnant women.

This patient group has two defining features: They will do whatever they can for their babies, and often they have used up the patience and support of their families. The goal of the program is to step in and do whatever can be done to move these patients toward health through a multidisciplinary approach, of which the most important component is social work.

Of the opiate-addicted mothers who come to Magee, most are addicted to either heroin or prescription drugs. The number of patients addicted to prescribed narcotics is steadily increasing. When the program began in 2002 there were about three or four patients a month. Now, the typical census is seven to 10 in a week.

Magee converts the mother from opiates to methadone to avoid withdrawal symptoms that might hurt the baby. The process of conversion occurs while the mother is an inpatient, and takes approximately three days. The mother is then referred to a methadone clinic for treatment and psychological counseling.

Magee also provides care for the babies at risk for neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). The hospital utilizes a therapeutic environment that includes low lighting, music therapy, psychologists, and even volunteer cuddlers.

The at-risk baby stays in the nursery for a minimum of seven days and then, depending on symptoms, may be eligible for discharge.

Nurses and cuddlers in the nursery become visible role models for the mother to learn how to take care of her baby. If the baby is diagnosed with NAS, the baby will stay in the nursery for an average of 21 to 30 days, receiving morphine as treatment for NAS. The first year these services were offered, there were 25 babies with NAS at Magee. Last year, there were more than 200.

The hospital also has reached out to patients who are considered "freedom-challenged." These are patients who are pregnant, opiate-addicted, and in jail. Originally, Magee started a relationship with the Allegheny County Jail so the hospital could take patients for methadone conversion and then send them to Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC. Now Magee reaches out to patients in a variety of jails in the Pittsburgh area.

Social workers remain the cornerstone of the program, assessing each mother and child to determine whether Children, Youth and Families Services (CYF) needs to become involved. Although many patients are afraid of being declared a CYF candidate, Magee prides itself on being nonjudgmental. "The word on the street is that Magee is a nonjudgmental environment," says **Bawn Maguire**, outreach coordinator, OB Support. "My philosophy has always been that we are providing movement toward health."

Magee's initiative to help mothers who are opiate-addicted in a nonthreatening, medically sound, and supportive way has helped hundreds of mothers begin their fight against addiction and move toward health.

A New Class of Project SEARCH Students Graduates

With summer drawing to a close, students are gearing up for classes while recent graduates are applying for jobs. You will find a similar situation at three UPMC facilities that host Project SEARCH, an initiative that introduces students with significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities to a nine-month program of job training, career exploration, and life coaching.



Project SEARCH was founded by Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996, and in the intervening years it has expanded to more than 200 sites around the world. Five years ago, UPMC Mercy launched UPMC's first Project SEARCH program, and there are now programs at UPMC Passavant, which just graduated its first class, and UPMC Northwest. For the two Allegheny County facilities, UPMC collaborates with Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Intellectual Disabilities to identify prospective students and help them through the application process. For UPMC Northwest, the Venango Training and Development Center acts in the role that Goodwill plays with the Pittsburgh locations.

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Students applying to Project SEARCH must be at least 18 years old and in their last year of high school (students in Pennsylvania can attend high school until they are 21). They begin the program in August and work until they graduate in June, spending the first two weeks attending workshops, touring the hospital, learning basic skills, and visiting different departments to decide where they want to be placed. They are then assigned to a department for a 10- to 12-week rotation, followed by a workshop week to acclimate them to another department before another 10-week rotation. This pattern continues during their stay.

During each rotation, the students are immersed in that particular workplace, so when they leave the program they have the skills and experience to step into employment. In between rotations, students are given UPMC performance evaluations to determine how well they're doing, what they've learned, and what they need to work on. Students also receive guidance about the job-search process. They learn how to write a resume, what to expect when they apply for a job, and how to interview well. After students complete all their rotations, their advisers review their skills and performance in different areas, but the students themselves are the ones who decide where to apply.

And they don't necessarily apply to UPMC. Although the hope is that the students will accept a position at UPMC, some students find jobs with other companies. One recent student was hired by Mellon Bank, and another by King's Family Restaurant. The ultimate goal is for the student to get a job somewhere in the community, where he or she will have the best chance to be successful. Staff from Goodwill and Venango Training and Development Center keep in touch with graduates and provide help and guidance as needed. Those who have successfully completed the program often return with their parents to welcome the new class and make them feel comfortable about the journey that lies ahead.

At the Sixth International Project SEARCH Conference on July 24, UPMC Mercy received an Employment Outcome Award for placing more than 60 percent of its students from the 2010-11 class. Other participating UPMC facilities are continuing that record of success. Last June, 21 students graduated from the Project SEARCH program: 10 from UPMC Mercy, six from UPMC Northwest, and five from UPMC Passavant. Of those 21 graduates, nine have already accepted positions at UPMC, while the others are still in the application and interview process.

A new class of students began Project SEARCH in this past August, starting their own journey toward a successful transition to employment and adult life.

LifeSolutions Corner

"I'm so stressed at work! Getting it all done and meeting deadlines is getting harder and harder. My blood pressure goes up as soon as I walk in the door, and I leave at night with a stomachache. Can LifeSolutions help? I don't want my employer to know I'm coming to LifeSolutions about work."

Yes, we can help. The workplace is where employee assistance programs began. We understand what happens at work, which means LifeSolutions is definitely a resource to address work stress. And it is confidential, so your employer won't know.

Small Changes Have Big Impact

LifeSolutions will assist you in figuring out a plan of action to manage work stress. For example, there are a variety of successful strategies that can make a big difference, including relaxation techniques, increased movement (stretching at your desk), and cognitive reframing (are your thoughts stressing you out?). You might benefit from looking at how technology (smartphone/ BlackBerry) flows over into your personal life, and the benefits of "turning off" so you can "tune in" to family and friends.

We'll explore what makes sense for you and support your making the changes you decide to make.

Call 1-800-647-3327 today to schedule an appointment. We're available by telephone or in person, whichever is best for you. Remember, it's free and confidential.

Also, check out our newly redesigned website, www.lifesolutionsforyou.com. Log in with your company code (UPMC), and then click on "Visit our WorkLife portal" for lots of information on managing all kinds of stress.

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