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NIDA-Supported Study Shows Significant Association between Smoking, Mental Disorders in Pregnant Women

Alert to Healthcare Providers: Research Supports the Benefit of Screening for Mental Disorders in Pregnant Women Unable to Quit Smoking

New research has identified an association between mental disorders and nicotine dependence among pregnant women in the United States, not unlike what has been reported in the general population. The presence of these mental disorders in nicotine addicted pregnant women may make quitting smoking more difficult. Published in the April 2007 issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, this study was supported in part by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health.

The study included 1,516 pregnant women at least 18 years old who took part in the 2001–2002 National Epidemiologic Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions, a nationally representative survey of more than 43,000 U.S. adults administered by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

Researchers found that 21.7% of the pregnant women in the study used cigarettes and among those women, 57.2% were nicotine dependent. These results indicate that in the United States an estimated 12.4% of pregnant women are addicted to cigarettes. Women with nicotine dependence were more likely to meet criteria for at least one mental disorder compared to those that did not use cigarettes during pregnancy. Significant associations were found for dysthymia (a chronic depressive condition), major depressive disorder, and panic disorder.

“Understanding that these co-morbidities exist may shed light on why some women are unable to abstain from smoking during pregnancy even though they understand the negative health impact for them and their unborn children,” says NIDA Director Dr. Nora D. Volkow. “There is tremendous value in screening pregnant women who are unable to

abstain from smoking for mental disorders—to not only identify and treat those who have been undiagnosed but also to improve successful quit smoking attempts.”

Encouraging women to quit smoking before they become pregnant is important to the health of the fetus, in addition to improving the health of the mother. Pregnant women who smoke cigarettes run an increased risk of having infants with low birth weight and their children face an increased risk for learning and behavioral problems.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world’s research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to ensure the rapid dissemination of research information and its implementation in policy and practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov.

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