

WHY THE MOTHERS ACT SHOULD NOT BE PASSED

On the surface, The MOTHERS Act (S. 324) reflects its sponsors' compassion for mothers suffering from postpartum depression and psychosis. But when one looks closely at the important sections of the legislation, it is clear that this costly and sweeping mental health legislation not only fails the mothers of America, it's intended to inflate the balance sheets of Big Pharma.

- The bill omits language **clearly stating** there will be an evaluation of the large amount of clinical data **already available** on the **known risks of antidepressant and antipsychotic medications currently being prescribed to pregnant women and nursing mothers** (including birth defects, heart defects, spontaneous abortions, and infant deaths). See May 9, 2009 *Vogue* article, ***“Pregnant Pause: With a flurry of recent reports challenging the safety of antidepressant drugs for unborn babies, doctors and concerned mothers-to-be are rethinking the guidelines”*** by Alexis Jetter at <http://www.box.net/shared/deulxo16fp>
- The bill defines “postpartum condition” as only “postpartum depression (PPD) or postpartum psychosis.” The danger is that per these DSM-extracted terms to label women with mental disorders, this is only psychological, not physiological conditions which will be checked for, ruling out discovery of any real physical causes, such as hormonal imbalances or vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and neglecting the treatments thereof. Which brings us to the issue of “screening tools” in development cited in the bill. Are these merely psychological questionnaires, and who is developing them? Are they pharmaceutically funded?
- The bill cites various “entities” that will be eligible for grants and for participating in research and/or development of screening methods and/or treatments and delivery. Who or what are these “entities?” Are they pharmaceutically funded? Do they have conflicts of interest?
- There are ongoing investigations of various “non-profit” organizations who heavily promote or conduct screening. For example, **Screening for Mental Health, Inc.**, and its sub-organization **Signs of Suicide**, who heavily promote and conduct mental health screening, received \$4,985,925.00 from pharmaceutical companies prior to 2008. The **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)** receives **56%** of its funding from pharmaceutical companies. **Ten leading psychiatric researchers** (many from prominent universities) have been exposed in the last year for failing to disclose millions of dollars in pharmaceutical payments – **yet this bill contains no provisions for full disclosure of conflicts of interest for any “entity” receiving federal taxpayer funded grants.**
- Given that the Senate Finance Committee recently exposed the financial conflicts of interest of the top ten psychiatric researchers in the U.S., it is no small issue that the MOTHERS Act provides no research guidelines for public disclosure.
- Under the MOTHERS Act's current language, **research will be conducted without peer review – no checks and balances; no one to validate the integrity of the research which then will be used to determine a woman's mental health status.**
- **Simultaneously**, without allowing any checks and balances whatsoever on the research, it promotes a national “public education” campaign to include Public Service Announcements and television and radio advertisements, **essentially giving Pharma an opportunity for free, federally-funded advertising.**

SUMMARY: Without a fully completed, published, and publicly disclosed investigation of the dangers of current methods of treatment (drugs), efficacy of non-drug treatments, and discovery and disclosure of the causes for these conditions, clearly defined and available for review by the medical/scientific community and consumers, there should be no endorsement of a national educational or advertising campaign. There must be no new or massive utilization or promotion of any “screening tools” without first disclosing the researchers, entities, and methods used to develop these “screening tools.”

Therefore, as a concerned citizen and voter, I urge you to vote “NO” on the MOTHERS Act (S. 324).

Sincerely,

Address:

Stress Testing the MOTHERS Act

by Kelly Patricia O'Meara

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It seems these days that everything is a test. Yes, the powers that be have decided that taxpayer benevolence now is contingent upon passing a stress test. But much to the dismay of those being tested, the results may reveal, for example, that the nation's financial wizards and auto giants are actually bankrupt midgets and unworthy of America's support.

Given that officialdom has embraced the stress test as a barometer of future viability and success and a determinant for public financing, it seems reasonable to request that other important issues that very personally impact the health and welfare of the American people be subjected to similar stress tests. There is none more deserving of stress testing than the proposed MOTHERS Act.

On the surface, the MOTHERS Act reflects its sponsors overwhelming compassion and empathy for women suffering from alleged mental health disorders resulting from childbirth – often referred to as Postpartum Depression. But when one conducts a brief stress test on important sections of the legislation, taxpayers may find that this costly and sweeping mental health legislation actually fails women of America, but goes a long way in inflating the balance sheets of one of the most lucrative industries in the nation – big Pharma.

For instance, the MOTHERS Act legislation that currently is pending in the U.S. Senate states that the Secretary of Health and Human Services may “make grants to eligible entities...” to deliver essential services to individuals with a postpartum condition. What the legislation doesn't delineate is who and what entities may receive these grants. Are these “entities” funded by pharmaceutical companies? Lawmakers have not specified what constitutes an “entity” so it will be impossible to know if there are conflicts of interest between those who develop the screening tools and conduct research and the pharmaceutical companies who most certainly will benefit financially from the increased diagnosing.

Furthermore, no research guidelines have been provided for public disclosure. This is no small issue, given that the Senate Finance Committee recently exposed the conflicts of interest of the top ten psychiatric researchers in the U.S. who had received millions of dollars in pharmaceutical funding. Where is the guarantee that the “entities” are not pharmaceutical front-men?

The legislation also allows for the “expansion and intensification of activities” into the research of Postpartum conditions and “evaluation of new treatments.” This is a humdinger. Despite ever-increasing published data and clinical studies challenging the safety of antidepressants and other antipsychotic drugs, there is no guidance provided by lawmakers to mandate that the public be made aware of the avalanche of scientific data that not only questions the efficacy of the drugs available to mothers suffering from these conditions, but also warning of the dangers associated with currently available “treatments.”

The section of the legislation dealing with expanding the research into the causes of Postpartum conditions is wholly void of any guidelines that insure the validity of the research conducted, and provides nothing in the way of public disclosure or peer-review of research before it is launched in education campaigns. In the real world, research is conducted and submitted for peer review. In this instance, it appears that Congress has learned nothing from the ongoing banking debacle and naively believes that the researchers will be on their best behavior – self-policing themselves. This is a dangerous omission in the legislation, especially since the Senate Finance Committee has exposed the serious conflicts of interest that exist between researchers and pharmaceutical companies.

Making matters worse, much of the legislation revolves around funding national education campaigns about Postpartum Depression, including Public Service Announcements and television and radio advertisements. Based on the current language of the legislation, research will be conducted without peer review – no checks and balances; no one to validate the integrity of the research which then will be used to determine a woman's mental health status. Given that this research will be used to develop questions or tests for screening new mothers for possible mental disorders, one might find it important to know that the research has integrity and has been validated by the scientific community, free of pharmaceutical largesse. Congress apparently didn't think integrity of the research is important and there are no provisions to protect women from pharmaceutical driven research.

Taxpayers may also expect that such important legislation would make provisions for some kind of oversight; some government entity that could provide feedback on the success or failure of this mental health campaign. One avenue that may help lawmakers determine if these new programs are working is the Food and Drug Administration's MedWatch Adverse Event Reports. MedWatch collects information about people who have experienced adverse reactions to drugs overseen by the FDA. With the increased drugging that most certainly will occur with the increase in diagnosing, it seems logical that lawmakers would insert provisions in the legislation to annually review Adverse Event Reports collected by MedWatch, especially those relating to drugs prescribed in the treatment of Postpartum Depression. Unfortunately, because the nation's lawmakers have provided no provisions for oversight, countless numbers of women may be harmed by the "treatments" but will be none the wiser because no protections were provided in the legislation.

There also is the very basic question of why the government is endorsing this sweeping mental health legislation and sanctioning a national advertising campaign about Postpartum Depression when there is no definitive data about the cause of the condition or that it is an objective confirmable abnormality – the scientific standard for disease. Given that there are so many unknowns in this legislation, it seems irresponsible to go forward without reasonable protections in place.

Congress must insure that all research and screening tests proposed and endorsed by this legislation be disclosed for peer-review and consumer input before implementing any screening tests and approving any research to be used in the national education campaign, including Public Service Announcements and radio and television advertising.

Given the documented risks related to the current modes of treatments, including antidepressants and antipsychotics, which are commonly prescribed for Postpartum Depression and documented to cause birth defects and host of other issues in pregnant and nursing mothers, Congress must include mandatory reviews of published research and clinical data on the drugs prescribed for the treatment of Postpartum Depression.

Finally, Congress must protect the integrity of the research by providing strict guidelines to insure that there are no conflicts of interest between the researcher and the pharmaceutical industry.

Without these safeguards, the MOTHERS Act cannot today, or ever, pass a stress test of viability and mothers and their children certainly will be on the losing end of this mental health campaign. Sometimes it's in the best interest of the people for Congress NOT to act, and until our lawmakers are confident that all legislative precautions have been taken to insure optimum results, this is one of those times.

About the author:

Kelly Patricia O'Meara is an award-winning investigative journalist who authored more than two dozen articles examining the psychiatric pharmaceutical industry during her tenure at the Washington Times' Insight Magazine. Her articles resulted in record sales of the issues in which they appeared and among the national and international press that have featured her articles are Fox News, the O'Reilly Factor, CBS News, BBC, ABC's 20/20 and Hannity and Colmes. She is also the author of Psyched Out: How Psychiatry Sells Sickness and Pushes Pills that Kill. Prior to working as an investigative journalist, O'Meara spent sixteen years on Capitol Hill and was the lead investigator in several Congressional investigations. She holds a B.S. in Political Science from the University of Maryland.