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MAR 28 2018

Oral Question 187-18(3): Alcohol Consumption During Pregnancy

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on February 28, 2018 regarding Alcohol Consumption during Pregnancy.

As part of the Early Childhood Development Action Plan for 2017/18, the Department of Health and Social Services (Department) Wellness' Indigenous Health and Community Wellness Division delivered a Baby Friendly Initiative where clinicians learned to provide information to patients about the potential risks of alcohol use while breastfeeding and strategies to reduce the risks; and, to address common myths and areas of confusion.

Health care providers in the Northwest Territories (NWT) screen for alcohol and substances through supportive dialogue and interviewing, the use of questionnaires, and anticipatory guidance across the life span. At present, we universally screen expectant mothers for alcohol and substances at their first prenatal visit, throughout their pregnancy per clinical judgement, and at 6 weeks post-partum on a case-by-case basis.

If problematic use of alcohol and/or substances is identified and the individual wishes to receive supports and services, the healthcare provider completing the screening can make those referrals or the client can also self-refer. If a woman is pregnant during the time of screening, she is identified as "high-risk" and made a priority for referral and treatment services.

Early screening allows for potential to improve early diagnoses, and allow access to earlier intervention and resources that may mitigate the development of secondary impacts to newborns.

Available supports include counselling via the Community Counselling Program, 24/7 support via the NWT Help Line, voluntary supports and services via Child and Family Services. If a woman wanted to access facility based addictions treatment, a referral to the community counselling program would be most appropriate so the counsellor could help facilitate that process.

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The Department has also partnered with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to renew the school health curriculum. The two Departments are working collaboratively to ensure that current and relevant resources are available for maternal-child health promotion.

In addition, the Government of the Northwest Territories is a participating member of the Canadian Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Partnership Network. A guide was developed by the Manitoba FASD Coalition and was endorsed by the Canadian FASD Partnership Network in October 2017. This language guide provides dignity-promoting alternatives to stigma-inducing words or phrases commonly used in society and has been distributed to the Nursing Leadership Forum to share with nursing staff.

The guide can be accessed on the department's website at the following link:
<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/language-guide-fasd.pdf>.

As stated in the house, if the member would like to sit down and discuss the issue further I would be glad to schedule a meeting.

Thank you.



Glen Abernethy
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Mr. Tim Mercer
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. David Hastings
Legislative Coordinator
Executive and Indigenous Affairs