Effective Prevention of FASD

In an article published in *Recent Developments in Alcoholism: Treatment Issues* (Volume IX), Dr. Iris Smith and Dr. Claire D. Coles with the MSACD Project suggest that effective prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) should involve multilevel, multisystem strategies. These researchers suggest that at a minimum, prevention and intervention efforts should include the following components:

- **Community education** – communitywide education about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy have been shown to be effective in reducing the prevalence of alcohol consumption among low-risk and social drinkers. Educational strategies may include media campaigns, dissemination of printed materials, educational workshops, and warning signs in locations where alcohol consumption is likely to take place.

- **Professional training** – Drs. Smith and Coles suggest healthcare providers and other professionals who may interface with pregnant alcohol users need training in effective history taking with the alcohol-abusing client, intervention strategies with the high-risk alcohol user, and identification and intervention with the alcohol-affected child.

- **Accessible and appropriate services for pregnant alcohol abusers** – Drs. Smith and Coles report that pregnant women are often excluded from drug treatment programs and few programs include provisions for child care. Other barriers to services include the stigma attached to being pregnant and drug using, transportation problems, and the dearth of programs that
address the dual issues of addiction and pregnancy. Active case finding and outreach to pregnant alcohol and drug use is an important component of any prevention program.

- *Interventions with the mother/child system* – according to Drs. Smith and Coles, the dynamics of the alcohol and other drug abusing home environment often place the alcohol-affected child at additional risk for physical abuse and neglect. Deficient parenting skills and lack of knowledge about normal child development can lead to unrealistic parenting expectations. Parenting education programs that incorporate information on normal development, parenting style, and the special issues of the multigenerational alcohol-abusing family can have measurable effect on child outcome.

- *Early identification and intervention with the alcohol-affected child* – prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs often can lead to a variety of developmental problems in the exposed child. In many cases, however, the deficits will not be severe enough to qualify these children for special-education programs, despite the fact that the alcohol-affected child might derive considerable benefit from remedial services. Drs. Smith and Coles report that early identification and remediation of developmental disabilities can significantly improve the quality of life for the alcohol-affected child.

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