



# COVID-19, a psychosocial stressor in preterm deliveries: A case report

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## Introduction

- Premature delivery carries high neonatal morbidity, however its impact on maternal psychosocial wellbeing is profound and under-appreciated<sup>1</sup>.
- Postnatally, neonates are cared for in special care units, limiting physical contact which impacts heavily on the maternal-neonatal bond<sup>2</sup>.
- Within the grasp of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see further detachment and isolation in these patients<sup>3</sup>.

## Patient case

- A 25-year-old Aboriginal woman, G13P6, delivered prematurely at 33 weeks in a regional hospital.
- This pregnancy had a strenuous antenatal course with multiple re-presentations and transfers to tertiary hospitals.
- Her social issues include low socio-economic status, poor social support, minimal transport options and multiple children to care for.
- This was compounded during the COVID-19 crisis where limited visitation time and border restrictions created further distress, in an already precarious situation.

## Follow up

- On debrief, the patient described being socially isolated, with little family able to visit her (due to COVID-19 restrictions) whilst boarding with her neonate in the special care nursery. She was also personally limited to see her child in the nursery.
- The patient described feeling she has little maternal-neonatal bonding even outside of the hospital environment
- Financially, the patient suffered greatly as she spent multiple admissions in a tertiary hospital geographically distant from her family. Her cost for travel, babysitting and accommodation had a great impact on her ability to care for herself and her family.
- She was referred to outpatient postnatal anxiety and depression services with ongoing psychological management and social support

## Discussion & Conclusion

- Preterm labour carries high neonatal morbidity, and impacts on both maternal wellbeing and newborn-bonding. In this case we demonstrate a woman with multiple social stressors at baseline.
- The superimposition of COVID-19 restrictions for this patient has caused a highly tumultuous, expensive and emotional postnatal period. Putting her at higher risk of post natal depression.
- Due to restrictions, the mother was unable to see her newborn frequently, had limited physical contact and through discussion, feels she has not bonded well with her newborn and was unsupported by the hospital.
- We raise the question as to whether, in light of future pandemic precautions, the early involvement of social work, assignment of accommodation and other supportive measures should be implemented for these women.

## Take Home points

- Premature deliveries affect maternal psychological wellbeing
- COVID-19 exacerbates stress, with further boundaries to visitation, transport and accommodation
- We raise the question to explore further research into an increase in post natal depression in the context of COVID-19
- We recommend the following in premature management:
  - Early social work involvement
  - Identification of financial stress
  - Provision of accommodation, for both family and mother



## References

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