



COPE

Centre of Perinatal Excellence

Wounded Healer:

The lived-experience of postpartum psychosis

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CONTENT WARNING:

Discussion of perinatal mental illness and suicide.

Please go gently ...



*“I’m on my way home from work when
my baby turns into a dragon.”*

- Because I’m Not Myself, You See



What is postpartum psychosis?

- Affects 1 to 2 in 1000
- Considered a psychiatric emergency
- Symptoms typically occur in first few days to two weeks after birth.



Early signs and symptoms

- Finding it hard to sleep
- Feeling full of energy or restless and irritable
- Feeling invincible
- Having strange and irrational beliefs



Early signs and symptoms

- Kaleidoscopic – symptoms can change rapidly
- High or low mood
- Visual, auditory or olfactory hallucinations
- Symptoms can wax and wane



Postpartum psychosis can affect a mother's thinking and perceptions, resulting in what is known as **psychotic symptoms.**



How did
it present
for me?





“Some cases get under your skin. This one got under mine. But it also nestled itself in the depths of my brain.”



*“It occurs to me as I’m
out walking one
afternoon, that I don’t
actually exist. I am
dead.”*



“Diagnosis of acute psychosis is very straightforward when symptoms are severe. However, in milder cases where there is commonly symptom minimisation, partial insight and day-to-day fluctuation, these women may present well at cross-sectional assessment.”

– Professor Marie-Paule Austin, (O&G Magazine)



APRIL

Admitted to SJOG.
Withdrawn from
Zoloft. Started
Avanza 7.5mg.
Discharged after 3
weeks. Avanza
increased to 15mg.

MAY

Dr Q. Psychotic
depression.
Withdrawn from
Avanza.
Medication-free for
approximately six
weeks.

JULY

Return to work two
days per week.

AUGUST

Return of symptoms.
Teary.
Tired. Difficulty
concentrating. Am I
real? Suicidal
ideation. Commence
Lexapro 10mg.
GP once a week,
psychiatrist twice a
week.



SEPTEMBER

Commenced Seroquel 12.5mg.

OCTOBER

Next-door neighbour's suicide. Symptoms remain. Teary, suicidal. Seroquel to 25mg.

NOVEMBER

Walked in front of car. Daily suicidal ideation.

DECEMBER

Increased Lexapro to 20mg. Seroquel to 37.5mg. D's death.

JANUARY

Change in GP

MARCH

Hospitalised



“Ariane has suffered from a severe psychotic depression in the postnatal period. She has had significant agitation, anxiety and panic. Recovery also sadly brings with it the realisation of the gravity of her illness ...”

Dr Q - Perinatal Psychiatrist



Sliding doors moments

- I wasn't screened during pregnancy – no EPDS or ANRQ.
- My PNRQ score was 42 (follow up is required at 23.)
- “You lot are the worst.”
- Presented for help with breastfeeding /focus on baby.
- My husband was excluded on MBU (no corroboration of my “lies.”)



Seeing the mum behind the woman

- “You’re a midwife/nurse/GP/psychologist – you’ll be fine.”
- Recent cases of infanticide where mother has been a midwife.
- Dr Margaret Oates - review of women who suicided postnatally.
- Mothers were relatively socially advantaged and well supported
- Most had higher education and “a worrying number were health professionals.”



Beyond Postpartum Psychosis Facebook Group

“I believe the message should not be – ‘we won't talk about PP because it is rare’ and rather ‘let's get the message out there that postnatal psychosis can happen to anyone but with the correct treatment it is survivable, and quality of life can be fantastic afterwards.’”

‘Sometimes when a mum says she hasn't slept, that's literally what she means.’



Beyond Postpartum Psychosis Facebook Group

“They were so carefully on the look-out for postnatal depression and anxiety they completely missed signs of mania and psychosis.”

“Continuity of care after discharge from MBU was more helpful than anything else that year. I had a lovely nurse.”



Beyond Postpartum Psychosis Facebook Group

“Don’t assume that expressions of religious or spiritual thinking is normal for the mum. I think the nurse missed my delusions and grandiose thinking because she was quite spiritual herself! But my husband could have confirmed it wasn’t normal patterns of thought for me.”



Beyond Postpartum Psychosis Facebook Group

“I went to a MCHN at 6 weeks. When I booked an appointment the receptionist said, ‘the first six weeks are the hardest and it does get better.’ I did the EPDS. I wasn’t told my score was 13. No action was taken and no plan was put in place to support me.”



Prevention and detection

- PP can be prevented in some cases because there are some risk factors – for example, bipolar disorder.
- Risk of recurrence with subsequent pregnancies – can be managed.
- Look for behaviour that is “odd” or “strange.”
- Dr Q: “You need to protect your sleep.”



Matrescence and recovery

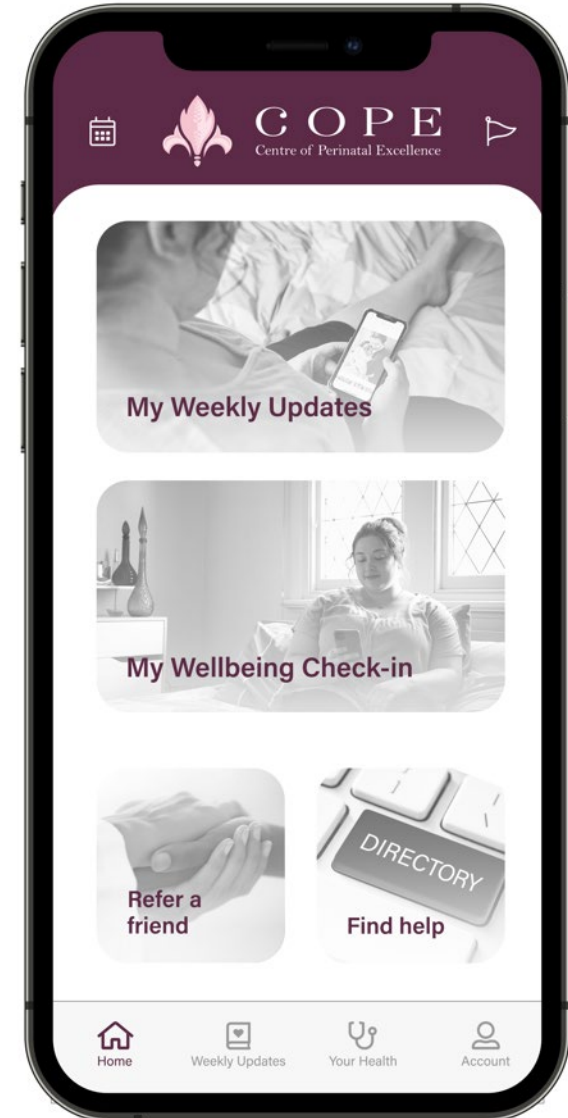
“I learn on TikTok that flamingos lose their pink colouring while raising their chicks because they give them so much of their food and energy. At some point though, it comes back.”





Resources

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- PANDA - 1300 726 306
- Our website: cope.org.au
 - Ready to COPE app
 - eCOPE Directory
- COPE National Perinatal Mental Health Clinical Guideline

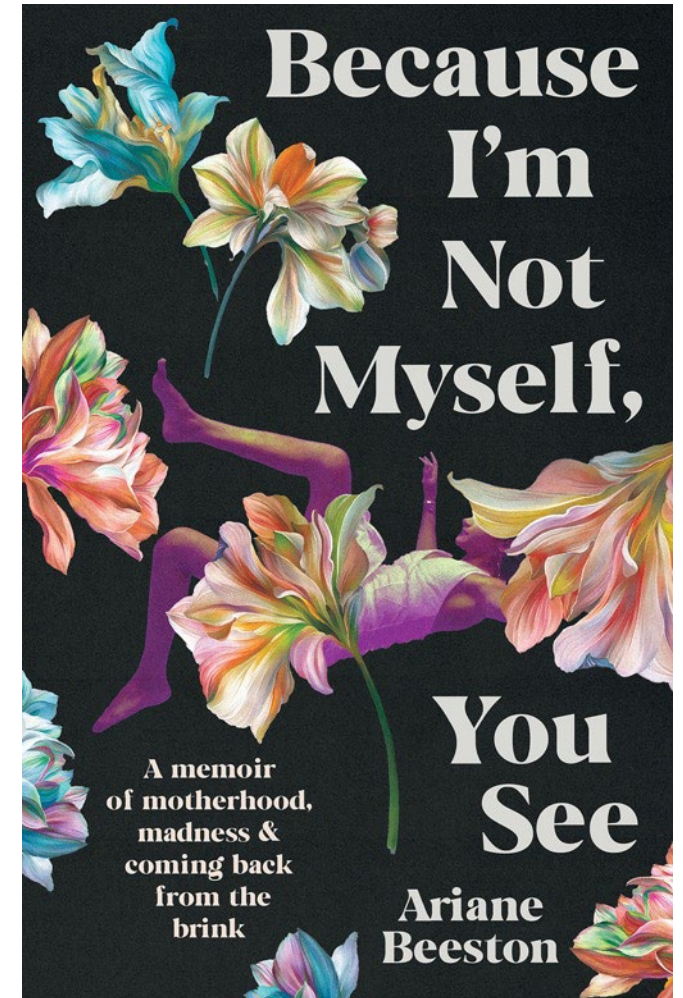




Resources

Because I'm Not Myself, You See:
A memoir of motherhood, madness &
coming back from the brink.

(Black Inc)





Thank you!



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