

Depression Case 1

Susanna is a 35 year old woman who has a diagnosis of Recurrent Depressive Disorder and is referred to the perinatal mental health service when she is 12 weeks pregnant. This is her first pregnancy and was planned and she is happy about it.

You see her for assessment when she is 15 weeks pregnant. She is currently well with no symptoms of mental illness but is anxious about becoming unwell and how this might affect her baby.

She first developed depression when she was 19 years old. She has had an admission when she was 21 years old for treatment of severe depressive episode without psychotic symptoms. When she was 23 years old she was detained under Section 2 and admitted for 12 weeks after she was seen looking agitated and dishevelled on a train platform. She had planned to jump under a train and had left a suicide note. She was treated with Lithium and Fluoxetine. She gradually reduced and stopped her medication when she was 29 years old. One year later, in the context of ending a 2 year relationship with a partner who was physically and emotionally abusive, she relapsed and had a severe depressive episode and thought about jumping from a bridge. She neglected her self care and had 4 months off work. She was under the care of the Home Treatment Team and responded well to restarting Fluoxetine and Quetiapine. She also saw a clinical psychologist and had 12 sessions of CBT which was helpful. Since then she has stayed well and continued treatment until she decided to stop her medication when she wanted to plan a pregnancy. She thought the medication would harm her unborn baby. She said she wouldn't take medication unless it's guaranteed to be safe for the baby.

There is a strong family history of depression. Susanna's mum had Postnatal Depression and was admitted to hospital after Susanna's younger brother was born.

She has many happy memories from her childhood but also had some difficult times. Her mum was caring when she was well, but Susanna remembers her being very depressed at times and staying in bed for weeks at a time. Her parents often argued and she saw her dad hit her mum on several occasions. She was scared of her dad. He had high expectations of her academically and was very critical and sometimes shouted at her if he thought she was not doing well. She did well academically at school and made friends.

Susanna is a teacher at a local state school in a deprived inner-city area. She enjoys her job but finds it stressful. She has perfectionist personality traits.

She has been married to her husband for 3 years. She initially said they have a good relationship, but then disclosed emotionally controlling behaviour – he checks where she is if she's late back from work and doesn't like her going out without him. She has lost touch with some old friends since being in the relationship with him as they suggested he was abusive and she should leave him but she didn't agree. He works as a taxi driver. Susanna and her husband are thinking of moving from London to Manchester, where her husband's family live. Their landlord has increased the rent and they will need more space anyway once the baby is born. Her husband is from a very traditional Indian family. They were not happy about the marriage initially but Susanna gets on reasonably well with them now. Susanna has never told them about her mental health history. Susanna's mum is supportive but lives in Spain.

What are your concerns?

What plan will you make for her care during the perinatal period?