Office of National Controlled Drug Policy

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

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The mission of ONDCP is to coordinate a government-wide public health approach to reduce drug use and its consequences. This effort includes a renewed emphasis on education, prevention and treatment programs (in appropriate healthcare settings), and funding scientific research on drug use. One of the groups that have been most significantly impacted by the opioid crisis is pregnant women and their newborn infants. Newborn infants who have been exposed to prenatal opioids often develop NAS, a form of acute opioid withdrawal. The incidence and severity of NAS has increased markedly by 4-6 fold in the past several years. None of the treatments for NAS are FDA approved for this indication since there has been insufficient study on both safety and efficacy of the treatments. In addition, developmental outcome of these infants and potential genetic influences have not been well studied. Drs. Davis and Lester are the Principle Investigators of the largest trial ever sponsored by NIDA examining clinical, behavioral, and genetic factors associated with NAS. The goal is to development optimal approaches for the prevention and treatment for NAS as well as predictive models to identify the highest risk mothers and infants. While this goal represents a significant challenge, we are on the verge of significant breakthroughs in several important scientific areas. A multidisciplinary approach involving health care workers, addiction specialists, social workers, politicians and law enforcement is urgently needed for us to improve the outcome for this most vulnerable population.