MotherToBaby Lands Federal Funding to Expand Services

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As January's National Birth Defects Prevention Month comes to a close, the United States' Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau (HRSA) opens the door for expanded access to pregnancy health education resources by funding the world's leading organization of experts in the field of teratology (the study of exposures that cause birth defects) – the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS) MotherToBaby network.

OTIS, an international non-profit, has been awarded a two-year, $2.4 million cooperative agreement from HRSA, establishing a nationwide reproductive and environmental health network. The MotherToBaby network, which consists of 14 affiliate OTIS sites housed at universities and hospitals across the country, provides FREE, evidence-based, personalized risk assessments, education and counseling regarding the effects of exposures like prescription and over-the-counter drugs, alcohol, smoking, illicit substances, vaccines, beauty products, herbal supplements, chemicals and more during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

"Approximately 50% of women report taking at least one medication during pregnancy and may be doing so before they even realize they're pregnant," said Kenneth Lyons Jones, MD, MotherToBaby past president. "Instead of having to scour unreliable online message boards and websites for information about a medication's risk to a developing baby, they can talk directly to an expert in this topic who will have the most up-to-date research available to them," he explained.

More than 100,000 women and their health care providers seek information about birth defect prevention from MotherToBaby every year already. The new federal support is expected to help increase awareness of the expertise MotherToBaby has to offer among women and health care providers in more hard-to-reach populations.

"Not only is this is a huge step forward for women and children's health, but also the general public's, since it'll allow us to staff increased calls, answer more questions and, ultimately, prevent birth defects, leading to a healthier society," said Jones, who is also one of two doctors who discovered Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in 1973. "With a broader presence, we'll also be able to better educate new audiences about dangerous behaviors like drinking alcohol during pregnancy."

Partner organizations, such as Help Me Grow Utah, have applauded HRSA's move to provide funding to the MotherToBaby network. "At Help Me Grow Utah, an affiliate of the Help Me Grow National Network, we understand the challenge of funding. Through a new cooperative agreement with HRSA, all women have been provided access to the MotherToBaby's hotline, with the latest information about risk exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding. The result is improved health for moms and their babies, which helps put infants on track for reaching optimal development, a goal we wholeheartedly support," said Barbara Leavitt, Program Director of Help Me Grow Utah.

The public can be connected with bilingual (English/Spanish) teratogen information specialists at MotherToBaby and receive personalized risk assessments, education and counseling by calling toll-free 1-866-626-6847. The MotherToBaby website also houses a library of fact sheets on medications and other exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding located at https://mothertobaby.org//a>.

Media Contact: Nicole Chavez, 619-368-3259, nchavez@mothertobaby.org. Interviews in Spanish can also be arranged.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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