

NEWS NEWS



Department of Human Services

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DHS EXPANDS UNIT THAT ENSURES THE SAFETY OF INFANTS BORN EXPOSED TO ILLEGAL DRUGS

Philadelphia, November 30, 2010- The Department of Human Services has expanded its unit that ensures the safety of vulnerable infants and appointed its first Director. The CAPTA unit was established in response to the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA), which mandates that birth hospitals report infants born and identified as being affected by illegal substance abuse.

Kate Maus has joined DHS as Director of CAPTA services, which helps ensure the safety of infants with prenatal exposure to illegal drugs. Maus, who for the last six years served as the Director of the Maternal, Child and Family Health Division of the Department of Public Health, brings a wealth of child welfare and public health experience to her new position. In addition to serving 14 years with the Health Department, she has worked as a medical social worker on the OB-GYN service at several Philadelphia hospitals, as well as at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia on a project for children with special needs and as a social worker with SCAN.

According to Maus, "when the report comes to DHS, hotline staff use a guided decision making tool to determine if there is a safety threat." General reports with no safety threat are referred to the CAPTA team, which goes to the hospital to interview hospital staff and, when possible, meet

with the mother. The team also conducts a home visit to assess for safety, family support and the physical condition of the baby.

Based on this initial assessment, cases are then either referred to the Division of Community Based Prevention Services or to the CAPTA Extended Assessment Team for further assessment. The Extended Assessment Team, previously part of MCFH and now residing at DHS, works with the family over a period of weeks to determine the type and extent of parental substance abuse, the physical health of the mother and baby and the mother's need and readiness for treatment. If she is amenable, the team also helps the mother obtain treatment.

The new CAPTA unit has a staff of ten. The three staff formerly at MCFH will be thoroughly integrated into DHS. The former MCFH team will take the safety assessment refresher course to ensure they are familiar with the terminology and can better inform the process. "Bringing the unit to DHS will enhance communication between the assessment team and DHS. It will also allow for "joint teamings" providing greater input on cases."

Among Maus' goals for the unit are working with referring hospitals on the timeliness and accuracy of reports, as well as protocols around testing and working with women's treatment programs to develop a shared approach to helping mothers with substance abuse issues.

"The expansion of this unit and the addition of Kate, means better outcomes for children" says DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose. Maus will also be working on issues related to substance abuse. Ambrose says "Kate will help liaison with the Department of Behavioral Health to ensure timely access to effective treatment to support our efforts at reunification. Currently, there are so many restrictions on what information can be shared. We need to figure out how we can structure communication in ways that facilitate handling cases more effectively."

In the long term, Maus hopes to expand the unit's focus to address infants affected by alcohol abuse. She points out that the current CAPTA law only addresses illegal substance abuse, but notes that alcohol abuse can be equally, if not more, compromising on the mother's ability to care for her children and that alcohol consumed during pregnancy can have severe developmental consequences for the newborn. "We need to examine how we manage cases of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and determine what interventions are most effective," she says.