

Supporting new mums

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"It's important for women to realise they are not alone and there is light at the end of the tunnel, even though when you are going through it, it seems like it's never going to end," she said.

She said she was lucky in a sense her depression was so severe she didn't "slip through the cracks" and miss out on appropriate treatment as Gidget and many other women had.

"A lot of women try to hide it, but in my case it was obvious to everyone around me that I wasn't functioning and I just shut down from my family and friends," Gloria Barton said.

"I was expecting it to be such a happy time in my life but I just felt I was in a black hole.

Fortunately it was picked up and dealt with and I was able to get my life back on track and have a normal happy time with my little boy."

Gloria Barton said the Gidget Foundation had embarked on a campaign called Start Talking to try to break down the stigma about post-natal depression that prevented some women seeking help. She said it was also working to get support for a resource centre where health professionals, women having problems and those close to them could access online or telephone information about available support and treatment options.

"A lot of women don't want to admit



Simone Short (centre) who set up the Gidget Foundation with friends Cathy Knox (left) and Libby Bowditch and son, Charlie.

they're having a tough time," she said. "They feel like it's a personal failure because everyone thinks motherhood is such a natural process, but that means they are not getting the help they need. People need to recognise it is an illness, it is common, it passes and you can get help."

She said the foundation's role at this week's conference of the International Marce Society would give it valuable exposure to health professionals working in this field.

* **The Gidget Foundation bears the nickname rather than the real name of the woman who inspired it to preserve her family's privacy.**

Expert: views are unrealistic

CURRENT practice relating to the screening, diagnosis and treatment of Australian women suffering from post-natal depression is deficient, according to an obstetrician who will represent the Gidget Foundation at an international conference in Manly this week.

Dr Vijay Roach will be speaking at the biennial conference of the Marce Society, a 30-year-old international organisation of health professionals and carers dedicated to improving the understanding and treatment of mental illness related to childbearing.

He said if left untreated peri-natal anxiety and depression could have a devastating impact on a mother's health, relationships and bonding with her new baby, yet options for assessment and treatment were both inadequate and difficult to access.

He said there could be a number of social factors responsible for the present rate of one in five mothers developing post-natal depression, including time pressures and unrealistic role models.

"Our society is supportive of pregnant women and new babies, but the media presents a romanticised view of new motherhood that is demeaning and unattainable," he said.

■ The conference runs from September 10-13 at the Manly Pacific Hotel.

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