



NEWS RELEASE

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Well-Child Visits May Be Key to Improving Mother's Health and Future Birth Outcomes

IMPLICIT Network explores new model for screening mothers' health in NC and across nation

March 13, 2018, Asheville, NC—The Mountain Area Health Education Center ([MAHEC](#)) has partnered with the [Family Medicine Education Consortium](#) (FMEC), a national family medicine maternal child health learning collaborative, to test a new interconception care (ICC) model for assessing mothers' health during well-child visits.

ICC focuses on improving maternal health in between pregnancies to reduce complications associated with low birth weight and preterm births, which account for more than 70 percent of infant mortality, according to Dan Frayne, MD, medical director at MAHEC Family Health Centers in Asheville, NC.

Frayne, who is also a practicing family physician at MAHEC, worked with FMEC's IMPLICIT Network (Interventions to Minimize Preterm and Low birth weight Infants through Continuous Improvement Techniques) to develop this innovative approach that screens women during their baby's well-child visits to assess risk factors known to impact birth outcomes.

Through the IMPLICIT model, healthcare providers discuss smoking, depression, family planning, and multivitamin with folic acid use with mothers during their baby's well-child visits from birth to 24 months.

This preconception health screening is critical given that approximately half of the pregnancies in the United States are unintended. By the time women enter prenatal care, it is often too late to influence birth outcomes. Many women do not seek healthcare for themselves during the preconception period.

Implementation of the IMPLICIT ICC model in North Carolina is a collaborative effort led by MAHEC, the [Center for Maternal and Infant Health](#) (CMIH) at UNC School of Medicine in Chapel Hill, and the [South East Area Health Education Center](#) (SEAHEC) in Wilmington and program partners. This effort aims to decrease North Carolina's [infant mortality rate](#), which is one of the worst in the nation.

Dr. Sarah Verbiest, UNC CMIH's executive director is enthusiastic about this ICC screening approach, defining it as a wonderful opportunity to meet mothers where they are and provide attention not only to the baby but to the mother who is so integrally connected.

"We are in a unique position as partners in implementing, analyzing, and expanding the IMPLICIT ICC model," Verbiest explains. "Cross-collaboration will allow us to reach and better serve women at different points in their lives."

UNC CMIH is leading programs to advance the quality of care for women before, during, and after pregnancy. The center's Fourth Trimester project has identified numerous opportunities for improving postpartum care, underscoring the importance of promoting mom/baby dyadic care. The [National Preconception Health and Health Care Initiative](#), also run through the CMIH, is working with four states, including North Carolina and MAHEC, to advance clinical and consumer-friendly screening tools for the preconception/interconception period.

"Women often overlook their own care after pregnancy because they are focused on their children or work," Frayne shares. "But with more than 90 percent of well-child visits attended by the mother, these visits are

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opportunities to screen and support mothers for the things that can make the biggest impact on their own and their children's health."

Planning for the IMPLICIT ICC model began in 2006 when the March of Dimes, a major program sponsor, connected the IMPLICIT Network with staff from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address the lack of preconception care for women in the United States. The North Carolina state chapter of the March of Dimes helped fund initial implementation at MAHEC in Asheville in 2012.

Since then, the model has been used to screen women at more than twenty IMPLICIT Network sites across the country from Mississippi to Massachusetts, including six MAHEC Family Health Centers in Western North Carolina and FMEC partner organizations in Wilmington and the Piedmont region of the state. Recently awarded support from the Duke Foundation will enable wider dissemination of the model across North Carolina in the coming years.

Preliminary findings from IMPLICIT ICC implementation look promising

Preliminary findings from implementation of IMPLICIT ICC model will be published in the March 2018 issue of the [Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine](#), a peer-reviewed family medicine journal.

The IMPLICIT Network study shows that mothers attend the majority of well-child visits making them a consistent point of contact for reaching women. Additionally, mothers screen positive for one or more ICC risk factors at more than half of these visits, providing many opportunities to address behavioral risks to prevent future poor birth outcomes.

At MAHEC, providers are already seeing positive impacts from implementing the ICC model with 70% percent of screened patients taking multivitamins with folic acid, compared to a national average of only 34 percent reported in the most recent [Prenatal Health & Nutrition survey](#).

"Another big win we're seeing is increased use of effective birth control methods within the first year of baby's life," Frayne shares. "If a woman gets pregnant within six months of delivering her last child, the risk of preterm birth and other poor birth outcomes greatly increases."

The IMPLICIT Network hopes to encourage widespread implementation of the ICC model to improve the care of women and babies before, during, and after pregnancy across North Carolina and nationally.

To learn more about the IMPLICIT Network and IMPLICIT ICC model, visit: www.fmec.net/implicit.

The Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education and innovation. Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina. It is the largest Area Health Education Center in North Carolina, which evolved to address national and state concerns with the supply, retention and quality of health professionals. MAHEC's mission is to train the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through quality healthcare, innovative education, and best practice models that can be replicated nationally. For more information on MAHEC, visit www.mahec.net.

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