



Contribute to IFCC eNews

Improving equity in maternal and newborn outcomes by eliminating disparities in maternal drug screening

Opportunities for laboratory medicine to help enable and ensure health equity are expanding. In the United States, a key area is maternal and newborn screening for substance use. Despite similar rates of maternal substance use, Black peripartum mothers can be more likely to undergo urine drug screening (UDS) and be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) than White mothers. Inappropriate reporting to CPS can threaten the therapeutic relationship between patient and provider, while also creating barriers to prenatal care. Any barrier for care can have catastrophic outcomes, particularly in vulnerable areas, such as Missouri, where Black women are three times more likely to die within one year of pregnancy than White women.



From left to right: Lauren Nacke, Vahid Azimi, Jeannie Kelly, Stephen Roper, Noor Riaz

Like many institutions, the Washington University School of Medicine, Barnes-Jewish Hospital, and St. Louis Children's Hospital, in Missouri, used a positive history of isolated Cannabis use as an indication for UDS. Despite concerns that it is associated with other substance misuse, recent literature demonstrates no association. Nevertheless, Black mothers tend to be disproportionately tested and reported to CPS for isolated cannabis use.

To address these disparities, an integrated clinical care team composed of laboratory medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatricians, social work and information technology collaborated to safely remove isolated cannabis use as an indication for UDS in peripartum mothers. Through this collaborative effort, the number of deliveries with UDS decreased by 75% overall. Specifically, a 12% reduction was noted in Black mothers receiving UDS (from 22% to 10%) and a 1% reduction for White mothers (from 5% to 4%).

Importantly, the CPS reporting rate also decreased by 66% for Black mothers and 50% for White mothers.

For their outcomes associated with eliminating racial disparities and improving patient experiences, this integrated clinical care team was awarded the 2024 Recognition of Distinction through the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award program. Congratulations to Vahid Azimi, *Instructor, Pathology and Immunology Assistant Medical Director of Laboratory Information Systems*; Jeannie Kelly, *Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology Medical Director, Labor and Delivery*; Lauren Nacke, Noor Riaz, *Associate Professor of Pediatrics*; Stephen Roper, *Associate Professor Pathology & Immunology Associate Director of Pediatric Laboratory Services*.

To learn more about this best practice and others, and/or to apply for global recognition, please visit www.UnivantsHCE.com.