Hallmark Health hosts summit on drug abuse in mother

MELROSE — Hallmark Health System, in partnership with The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan, Congresswoman Katherine Clark, Melrose Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and Jewish Family and Children’s Service recently hosted a summit to discuss the region’s rapidly growing number of patients with maternal substance use disorders and their substance exposed newborns.

Sixty five providers from across the care continuum and the state, along with epidemiologists and researchers, joined federal and state legislators in identifying goals and strategies for caring for mothers with substance use disorders and substance exposed newborns.

Speakers included Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan, who spoke about her commitment to community collaboration, education and prevention. “I applaud Hallmark Health and Melrose–Wakefield Hospital for their commitment to addressing the issue of substance exposed newborns by promoting early intervention practices and establishing a coordinated community network of care,” she said. “This problem is too complex, too pervasive and too large in scope to address in any other way. As District Attorney, I have been working across Middlesex County to confront the opiate crisis through a multipronged approach. Early intervention, comprehensive treatment and the continuum of care model must be essential elements to this effort. I appreciate Hallmark Health and Melrose–Wakefield Hospitals for being proactive in this regard and for being at the forefront of this critical public safety and public health problem.”

Next, U.S. Congresswoman Katherine Clark spoke about her newly authored federal legislation. “Last month, we reintroduced the Protecting Our Infants Act of 2015 with strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate,” she said. “This bill is the first federal bill to help opiates exposed newborns. The aim is to help hospitals determine the best method of diagnosis and compassionate treatment, reduce hospital stays for newborns with NAS and the enormous costs of this care. It is the product of work that started in our community with care providers and treatment advocates. My hope is that partnerships between us and the communities we serve will continue to lead to solutions.”

Mentoring Mothers Kimberly Byrnes and Erica Asselin from the Jewish Families and Children’s Service’s NESST program (Newborns Exposed to Substances; Support and Therapy) spoke about the disease model of addiction shared their own stories of becoming a parent while in recovery from addiction and the transformative power of the peer support offered through their program. Participants also engaged in hands-on breakout sessions.

“This summit served to establish an ongoing formal collaborative of providers from every point of the care continuum of services for women and children, from the first pre-natal visit to the baby’s fifth year of life,” said Summit organizer Laura Sternberger.