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## **New WISH Center at SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital gives moms-to-be hope**

*The WISH Center marries high risk pregnant care and substance-abuse treatment to help pregnant women overcome addiction and give babies the best possible start.*

ST. LOUIS, MO (October 17, 2016) – SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital held a ribbon-cutting and open house on Thursday, October 13 to celebrate the grand opening of the new WISH (Women and Infant Substance Help) Center.

The WISH Center provides comprehensive, high-risk maternity care for women who are dependent on opioid drugs. It is the only center of its kind in the region.

The WISH Center was created in 2014 to address a growing need in the community. As opioid abuse reached epidemic proportions, the number of babies born dependent on these drugs has also increased dramatically. In 2012, nearly 22,000 newborns in the U.S. were treated for opioid withdrawal, according to one study.

The Center started out as a half-day clinic that operated within the SLUCare department of maternal and fetal medicine, but quickly became back-logged. A dedicated, full-time practice was needed to keep up with patient demand from across the bi-state area.

"The WISH Center is the culmination of two years of work. But, it's also a down payment into our future work. We have so much more work to do and so much further to go," said Jaye Shyken, MD, Associate Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health at St. Louis University and a SLUCare Maternal Fetal Medicine specialist and medical director of the WISH Center.

The WISH Center's multidisciplinary team of providers including a maternal fetal medicine specialist, a nurse practitioner who is trained in high-risk obstetrics, nurses, a nurse coordinator, social workers, a dedicated OB pharmacist provide care for patients. They coordinate with behavioral medicine therapists.

The team is working on developing a full two-year program that would continue care for new moms after the baby is born when the risk for relapse is greatest, according to Donna Bernard, director of maternity services at SSM Health. This includes partnering with outside organizations for things like job skills, housing, life skills and parenting to help moms maintain their sobriety. To her knowledge, it would be the first of its kind in the country.

**(more)**

At the WISH Center, pregnant women are prescribed buprenorphine, or they receive methadone from a federally licensed program. These medications alleviate withdrawal from opioids and target drug craving. The goal is to start moms-to-be on buprenorphine or methadone as early as possible to minimize pregnancy complications. Recently buprenorphine has shown to reduce the length of hospital stay for newborns compared to women who take methadone.

“It’s so easy as a society to look at drug addiction as a personal failure,” Shyken said. “But the very definition of addiction is that of a primary, neurobiological disorder that involves the reward pathways in the brain. Drugs permanently alter the brain and it had many far-reaching effects that are medical, spiritual, psychological and social. Our mission is to really start to address all of these things.”

“It’s important that we normalize treatment for this disorder. We have to consider it chronic like a medical problem and we also have to normalize it because this is a part of the fabric of our society right now.”

The WISH Center is located at 1035 Bellevue Ave on SSM Health St. Mary’s campus. The current clinic is 1,800 sq ft and includes ultrasound, fetal monitoring, examination rooms and a comfortable room for initiating treatment. It was intentionally designed to look like any other doctor’s office –inviting, pleasant and private. Within the next year and a half, the clinic will double in size. There also are plans to open a satellite practice in Carbondale, Ill. this December.

“At SSM Health, our Mission is ‘Through our exceptional health care services, we reveal the healing presence of God,’” said Travis Capers, president of SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital. “The WISH Center truly embodies that Mission. I couldn’t be more proud of the work Dr. Shyken, Donna and the entire team have shown over the last two years to address this need in our community. They’ve shown respect and compassion for their patients, never forgetting that addiction is a disease.”

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### **About SSM Health**

*SSM Health ([www.ssmhc.com](http://www.ssmhc.com)) is a Catholic, not-for-profit health system serving the comprehensive health needs of communities across the Midwest through one of the largest integrated delivery systems in the nation.*

*SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital – St. Louis is a 525-bed hospital specializing in high-risk obstetrics. A teaching hospital, St. Mary’s is home to an accredited internal medicine residency program and to Saint Louis University School of Medicine Obstetrics/Gynecology and Family Practice residency programs. For more information, visit us at [www.ssmhealth.com/stmarys](http://www.ssmhealth.com/stmarys) or find us on Facebook and [Twitter](#).*