



September 17, 2018

Chairman Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Ranking Member Gene Green
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

RE: "Better Data and Better Outcomes: Reducing Maternal Mortality in the U.S."

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member Green:

I write to you on behalf of the upcoming hearing scheduled for September 27, 2018 on Maternal Mortality. I lost my wife Alexis Joy in 2013 due to postpartum suicide, and I deeply believe that Congress needs to be aware of this ongoing crisis.

On August 30th, 2013 my wife Alexis and I had our first child, a beautiful healthy baby girl we named Adriana Joy.

August 30th, 2013 was supposed to be the happiest day of our lives. Rather, it was the most challenging, eye opening, brutal reality we had never been prepared for. Our daughter's delivery was a code blue delivery. This was the beginning of the end of our perfect life as I knew it. Alexis was diagnosed with PTSD from the delivery. Breastfeeding proved way more challenging than either of us would have thought. Baby Adriana cried, a lot. This did not help our situation.

Alexis was diagnosed with PTSD. She started worrying over everything. "Our perfect baby might be damaged", Alexis thought. Alexis was convinced Adriana had brain damage and we took the baby in for testing on her brain. She was fine. This was an answer my wife couldn't accept. Her fears seemed to grow daily. Each day she became more irrational, paranoid, and cried more. She would push food around on her plate but never took a bite.

She had been calling her ObGYN, psychiatrist, and pediatrician during this entire period of time. Each one said "Don't worry, it's just the baby blues. It will pass. You're fine. Just relax and enjoy this time."



I watched my wife lose nearly 50 pounds in 30 days. One doctor in an emergency psychiatric unit pulled me aside and said “Your wife’s not crazy. She will be fine. She just needs her family and friends. But, just in case there’s only two ways women as pretty as her commit suicide. They either asphyxiate themselves in the garage or overdose on pills. Just get rid of the car keys at your house and any prescription pills she could take. Women like her would never commit suicide in a “sloppy” way. They would never want to be remembered not looking their best.”

In our struggles to find help for my wife Alexis, **we went to 7 different hospitals or crisis centers in her last 13 days.**

On the morning of October 8th, 2013 I woke up to our Maltese puppy named Lucy, frantically barking to wake me up. Something seemed off. The air was stale, it was almost as if time had stopped. It’s a feeling you have to experience to really know. In that moment I knew. I jumped out of bed. Ran downstairs screaming Alexis name. No response. I could hear my daughter crying. I ran down to the kitchen, no Alexis. The dining room, family room, office- no Alexis. Outside on the deck, not there either. Downstairs to the garage, not there. In the basement, not there either. By this point I’m literally crazed, panicking screaming at the top of my lungs. I run back upstairs to find my daughter strapped to her changing table and crying. Still no Alexis. I run back downstairs to look again. As I look to the back of the basement there was my beautiful, perfect, love of my life. Lifeless hanging by TV cable from my basement ceiling. I called 911 screaming for them to help me save her. I remember going through the chest compressions and mouth to mouth bargaining with God please, please bring her back. Suddenly, paramedics and cops were everywhere. They pulled me from her and started working on her. This was only probably 7 minutes. The craziest 7 minutes nobody should ever go through.

These 7 minutes that paled in comparison to the 5 1/2 weeks of hell my wife had to endure. 7 minutes that pale in comparison to the eternity I will spend missing my best friend. 7 minutes that pale in comparison to the lifetime my daughter will spend wondering who her mom was. 7 minutes that pale in comparison to the times I spend coming up with answers to my daughter’s questions about why her mommy died. Will my daughter blame herself someday? Will she do the same thing when she has a baby someday? Will she even want to have a baby someday? 7 minutes that pale in comparison to the anxiety I get when my reality sets in that I have to do this parenting thing all alone.



All of this for no good reason.

Since my wife lost her battle with postpartum suicide, Pittsburgh has decided to not wait for another tragedy and to do something about it. Moms in Pittsburgh can now see a psychiatrist in under 48 hours because of Allegheny Health Network and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Alexis Joy Foundation. I'm confident in the near future it will be under 24 hours.

PPD is not a women's health issue, it is a family health issue. I firmly believe we owe it to our children to fix this preventable and treatable problem. I know I will do my part to make sure my daughter gets the care she deserves if needed, someday.

As Congress takes into consideration the escalating rise in maternal mortality and the need to figure out "Why are Mothers dying in this great country", I implore Congress to take a look at the mental health aspect of this issue. Perhaps if there was enough information on maternal mental health, its risks and evidenced based treatment options, my wife would be here with me and our daughter, today.

I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Steven D'Achille

Steven D'Achille, Founder
The Alexis Joy Foundation
2010 Lake Marshall Drive
Gibsonia, PA 15044
www.alexisjoyfoundation.org
412.606.0065

