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FINAL EDITION

## DRUG ADDICTION



PHOTOS BY EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

USED THROUGHOUT HER PREGNANCY: Sandra Dashiell plays with her 8-month-old daughter, Taylor, in their room at the treatment facility. Dashiell took up to 15 prescription pills a day while pregnant.

# BORN HOOKED

Prescription drug abuse is claiming a new kind of victim: babies born addicted.

BY AUDRA D.S. BURCH  
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In the warm glow of the setting sun, two mothers walk side-by-side from counseling sessions at the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center, past the stucco day-care building, past rows of shaded picnic tables and a playground full of giggles and pigtailed and untied sneakers.

The women — one pushing her 2-month-old daughter in a stroller, the other six months pregnant — came to this addiction treatment center in suburban Broward County in March to beat the prescription drug habits that threaten their lives and endanger their children. Their biggest fear is that their children will pay the price for their weakness. At Susan B. Anthony, the victories are counted in ba-

bies born clean and families reunited.

Nicole Montes and Jennifer Clingan grapple with savage addictions to the prescription painkiller oxycodone, a synthetic version of heroin that has emerged as part of the nation's fast-growing drug problem. The newest victims: babies born hooked on the highly addictive prescription narcotic.

"Oxycodone had such a grip on my life," admits Clingan, 33, a Marine and former insurance agent who is due in July. "It's like a monster that will not let you go. Now I am fighting to save this baby, to deliver a healthy son."

The two women and others like them are waging an invisible struggle in a state that has become a national

• TURN TO ADDICTED, 22A



IN REHAB: Jennifer Clingan holds an ultrasound photo of her baby boy taken at 14 weeks. She is due in July.

## MAYORAL ELECTION

# New Dade mayor faces crunch time, wary public

Whoever wins the county mayoral race will take charge of the sprawling county government amid a mountain of problems with little time to waste.

BY MARTHA BRANNIGAN  
AND MATTHEW HAGGMAN  
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When voters elect a new Miami-Dade County mayor — which could happen on Election Day Tuesday, but probably not until a June 28 runoff — the winner will be thrust into a pressure cauldron, confronting pressing challenges under scrutiny from a skeptical public.

By July 15 — slightly more than two weeks after the expected runoff — the mayor will have to present the Miami-Dade County Commission with a proposed budget for the sprawling county operations for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. A deficit of \$400 million is projected for the new budget, which is

\$7.5 billion this year. With a public that has little tolerance for tax increases, that means steep cuts.

By the fall, the mayor must face off with cantankerous union bosses as labor contracts open amid expectations that deep concessions will be on the table. The contracts for all 10 county unions — ranging from water-and-sewer employees to firefighters — expire on Sept. 30.

The new county executive must grapple with a transit agency that has been reeling under federal probes amid an extraordinary six-month suspension of all federal grants. Jackson Health

• TURN TO MAYOR, 20A

Voter's guide: Profiles and a breakdown of the issues, 1L-3L

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## TELEVISION

# With Oprah gone, who is going to tell us what we think?

After a very long goodbye, Oprah will end her monumental 25-year run as the queen of daytime talk with one last show on Wednesday.

BY GLENN GARVIN  
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In the most breathlessly anticipated abdication since Edward VIII gave up the British crown for an American divorcee, the queen of daytime television is walking away from her throne this week. Oprah Winfrey, who turned talk TV into a confessional and a cash box, is leaving the air Wednesday after 25 years.

"Who could have ever imagined this?" says Juliet Huddy, a Fox News anchor and former co-host of one of the scores of daytime talk shows that tried and failed to duplicate Winfrey's success. "How can she be leaving? She's Oprah! She's so far beyond anything the

rest of us can conceive. She's beyond larger than life ... I don't want to sound like I worship her, but I worship her."

The sweep of Winfrey's television achievements is immense: She invented one genre, the modern talk show, and midwived the birth of another, reality TV. She stayed on the air 25 years in a medium where careers are sometimes measured in weeks.

But Nielsen ratings don't

• TURN TO OPRAH, 2A

**MILLION DOLLAR BILLIONAIRE:** Oprah's final show is asking \$1 million for a 30-second advertising spot.



## EDUCATION | CHARTER SCHOOLS

# In big picture, different not always better

The charter school movement is exploding in Florida, but are the results any better than traditional schools?

BY KATHLEEN MCGRORY  
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Mornings at the Charter School of Excellence are an all-out attack on reading.

At 9 a.m. sharp, the children divide into small groups, spread out across the Fort Lauderdale campus and spend 90 minutes studying phonics, vocabulary and reading compre-

hension. To keep the student-to-teacher ratio low, every instructor in the building — the P.E. coach, fine arts teacher and teachers-in-training included — is assigned to a group.

The strategy is working. Despite a 71 percent poverty rate among students, the school has received eight consecutive A grades from

the state.

This is exactly what Florida's charter school pioneers envisioned when they launched the movement in the early 1990s. They argued that public schools set free from school board politics and big district bureaucracies could tailor their programs to pupils' needs, helping students to achieve.

Since then, the movement has exploded. More than 58,000 children now attend charter schools in

Miami-Dade and Broward — nearly a tenth of all public school students in South Florida.

That number is almost certain to balloon. State legislation passed last week will make it easier for new charter schools to open and existing ones to expand. Another new law will allow for the creation of virtual charter schools, which will enable students and teach-

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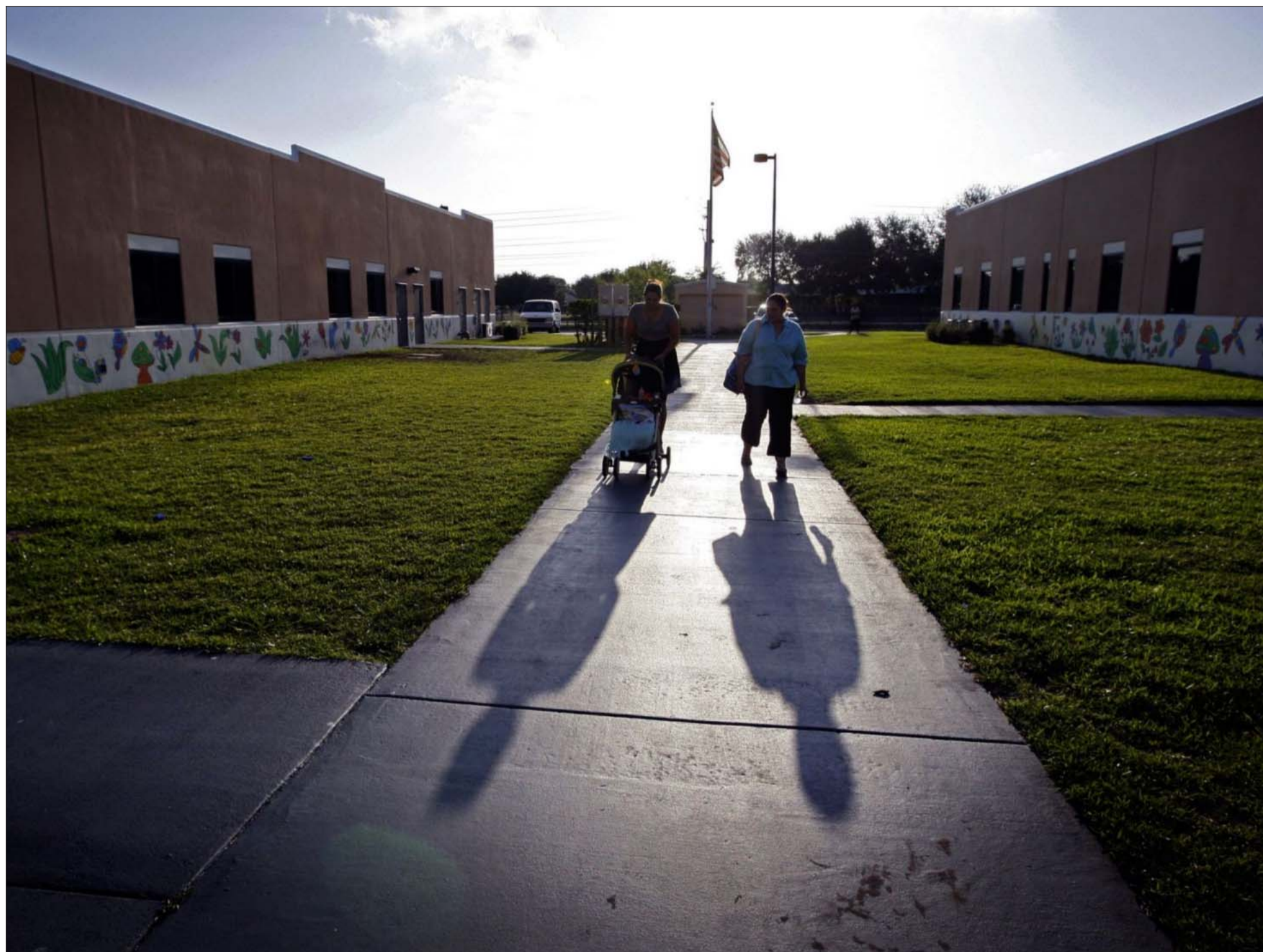
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## DRUG ADDICTION



PHOTOS BY EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**GETTING HELP:** Nicole Montes pushes her 2-month-old and walks with Jennifer Clingan, who is pregnant. They are at the center for oxycodone addictions.

## Struggling to treat babies born to addicts

• ADDICTED, FROM 1A

symbol of prescription drug abuse and in a county plagued by “pill mills.” Those on the front lines — police, doctors and nurses, social workers — are starting to witness the troubling results of a problem now affecting a new generation.

Three times a day on average, a Florida newborn is treated for drug withdrawal syndrome, meaning the baby was prenatally exposed to an addictive substance, according to the Agency for Health Care Administration. Experts say an increasing number of them are born to mothers using prescription opiates such as oxycodone, the painkiller that has roared through South Florida and other pockets of the state.

“Remember the crack epidemic? We are at the epicenter of prescription drug abuse in the entire country. We are in the midst of a public health crisis, which is why we have been pushing for stronger legislation to put these pill mills out of business,” says Attorney General Pam Bondi. “Innocent children are the greatest consequences of these horrible addictions.”

Measuring the scale of the emerging crisis isn’t easy. Hospitals track the number of babies born addicted in two ways, addiction in the mother and withdrawal in babies. But no single state agency monitors newborns dependent on prescription drugs specifically, statistics that Bondi says are needed to shape public policy.

With anti-pill mill legislation passed two weeks ago, Bondi says she now wants to develop an education campaign on the dangers of prescription drug abuse for developing babies.

“The numbers are hard to find. We know the numbers are increasing but we need the specifics... We need this to bring about as much awareness to the community as possible,” she says.

In 2010, nearly 1,100 babies born in Florida were treated for withdrawal syndrome, four times the number just five years ago, according to AHCA records. The number of mothers treated for pregnancy complications related to drug dependence almost doubled — from 240 to 463 — over the same five-year period.

While state records do not show the specific narcotics, healthcare professionals say a growing number of cases are related to prescription drug abuse in Florida. At St. Joseph’s Women’s Hospital in Tampa, at least 15 percent of the babies admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit are treated for withdrawal symptoms.

Twenty years ago, healthcare workers struggled to care for a generation of babies born to crack addicts. Now, neonatologists talk about the merciless screams, jitters and unusually stiff limbs of “oxy babies.” Treatment can include powerful drugs in tiny doses to pave their withdrawals or simpler remedies, such as volunteers and nurses rocking and cradling the babies in darkened, padded rooms to ease their abnormal sensitivity to noise and light.

State agencies are already feeling the impact. The Department of Children & Families’ central regional office in Orlando re-opened its Drug Dependent Newborn Unit in 2008 to handle the influx of cases. Last year, the Orlando office handled 206 cases in which newborns tested positive for a controlled substance or the mother had a documented drug history. Of those, 56 were prescription drug-related. And in Palm Beach County, DCF has expanded its drug screening to identify specific opiates or benzodiazepines in parents with dependency cases.

In Broward County, where many of the pain clinics dispensing the pills are concentrated, the fight has become public. Pickets gather monthly outside rogue clinics in Fort Lauderdale. On a recent day, the sign-carrying group included three mothers, one a neonatal nurse, all suffering in some way from the ravages of the oxycodone drug trade. One sign read: **BABIES ARE BEING BORN ADDICTED!**

Little research has been done on the effects of prescription drug abuse during pregnancy — the risks of evaluating pregnant women and newborns preclude many trials — and even less on long-term developmental effects on babies. In April, The Centers for Disease Control published its first study of the effects of babies

### Newborn Withdrawal numbers

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Dade	9	8	10	13	17	15
Broward	11	12	35	36	38	47
Palm	12	15	15	29	34	21
State	258	354	481	659	966	1,088

Source: Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration



**TREATS BABIES:** Mary Osuch manages the NICU at Chris Evert Children’s Hospital. “These are difficult situations. We have to talk to the mothers, without judging them, to get as much information as possible so we can help the babies.”

exposed to prescribed opiate painkillers, taken just before or early in pregnancy. It showed a moderate increase in risks of birth defects, including congenital heart problems. At Susan B. Anthony, Montes, 23, holds her youngest daughter, Kaitlyn, and talks about the relentless cravings for little blue pills and the darkness and shame that follow the high. She has been clean since Dec. 8 and hopes to walk out the door of the center in September drug-free and ready to parent.

“I was hooked hardcore on oxycodone. The only way I knew how to deal with my life was to get high,” she says. “I chose drugs over my child because I couldn’t handle both at the same time. All I can do now is start over and try to be a better mother.”

In another room in the main center, this one with a view of the outside world,

month, enough to sell and keep a steady high.

Getting the pills became her full-time job, she says.

Dieshell used throughout her pregnancy, up to 15 pills a day. She tried to stop in her seventh month by using methadone but “it was just one drug substituted for another,” she says. “I tried to withdraw again about a week before my delivery was induced.”

It was too late. Taylor arrived weighing five pounds even. She wouldn’t take bottles, screamed constantly — and tested positive for opiates. Her withdrawal symptoms were relatively mild. Dieshell took her home after five days of observation.

“I know it’s not logical, but I never made the connection with medication that I originally got from a doctor to hurting my baby,” she says. “Now that she is here, I am constantly bothered by the choices I made.”

At the Susan B. Anthony Center, half of the beds are occupied by women battling prescription drug addictions.

Founded by the Junior League in 1995, it’s one of a few places in Florida that allow mothers to keep child custody during drug or alcohol abuse treatment. The alternative: jail and foster care.

Today, it is at capacity with 61 women and 80 children.

“We are invested in the idea of a mother being able to keep her family intact as she works through a difficult situation,” says Marsha L. Carrant, the non-profit center’s founding chief executive officer. “They need to keep the bond. Often their strength comes from their children.”

In the main community room, a 12-step poster for addicts hangs next to wall art of rainbows and butterflies, illustrating the struggle that goes on here. Like other rehabs, this is a place of rules. Privileges are earned; curfews enforced. Life is defined by dates. The date you got clean. The date

of your relapse. The date you got back on the train. The date you leave.

Clients, with their children, stay on average six months. The center offers childcare services, job training, life skills and parenting classes.

Many of their stories are similar: a painful injury, a legitimate prescription, pills that made them feel euphoric, an unexpected pregnancy or parenting that becomes overwhelming.

Therapy — group and individual — forces the women to face their drug histories, deconstruct the cascade of poor choices and commit to changing. One group therapy session added last year is dedicated to handling feelings of guilt and shame.

Carrant, who has spent 30 years working with high-risk children and families, says that although the path out of addiction has remained the same, the kinds of addictions are not. “Ten years ago, maybe more, most of our clients were here because of crack,” Carrant says. “Now the drug of choice is pills, pills, pills.”

Pregnant women pass along nutrition — and just about anything consumed, including drugs — to the fetus through the placenta, which connects the baby to its mother in the womb. The baby becomes addicted along with the mother. At birth, the baby is still dependent on the drug and may develop a set of withdrawal characteristics called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome.

“They face a constellation of symptoms involving the three main systems. They are irritable and have high-pitched cries. They can be jittery. They experience nasal congestion, vomiting and diarrhea. They have erratic sleeping patterns and tend to be hypertonic [still limbs],” says Lester McIntyre, chief of Neonatology at the Memorial Health Care System in Broward, which includes Joe DiMaggio Children’s Hospital. “We are trying to withdraw the baby in a controlled environment and depending on the severity, the baby could be facing withdrawal for a couple of weeks or even months.”

Any combination of the telltale symptoms can raise

• TURN TO ADDICTED, 23A

## DRUG ADDICTION

## ‘I am constantly bothered by the choices I made’

• ADDICTED, FROM 22A

suspicions, leading to a urine or stool test to determine if there are controlled substances in the baby. Often, the baby has been exposed to more than one drug or alcohol. The babies' symptoms are measured under a scoring system to determine the severity.

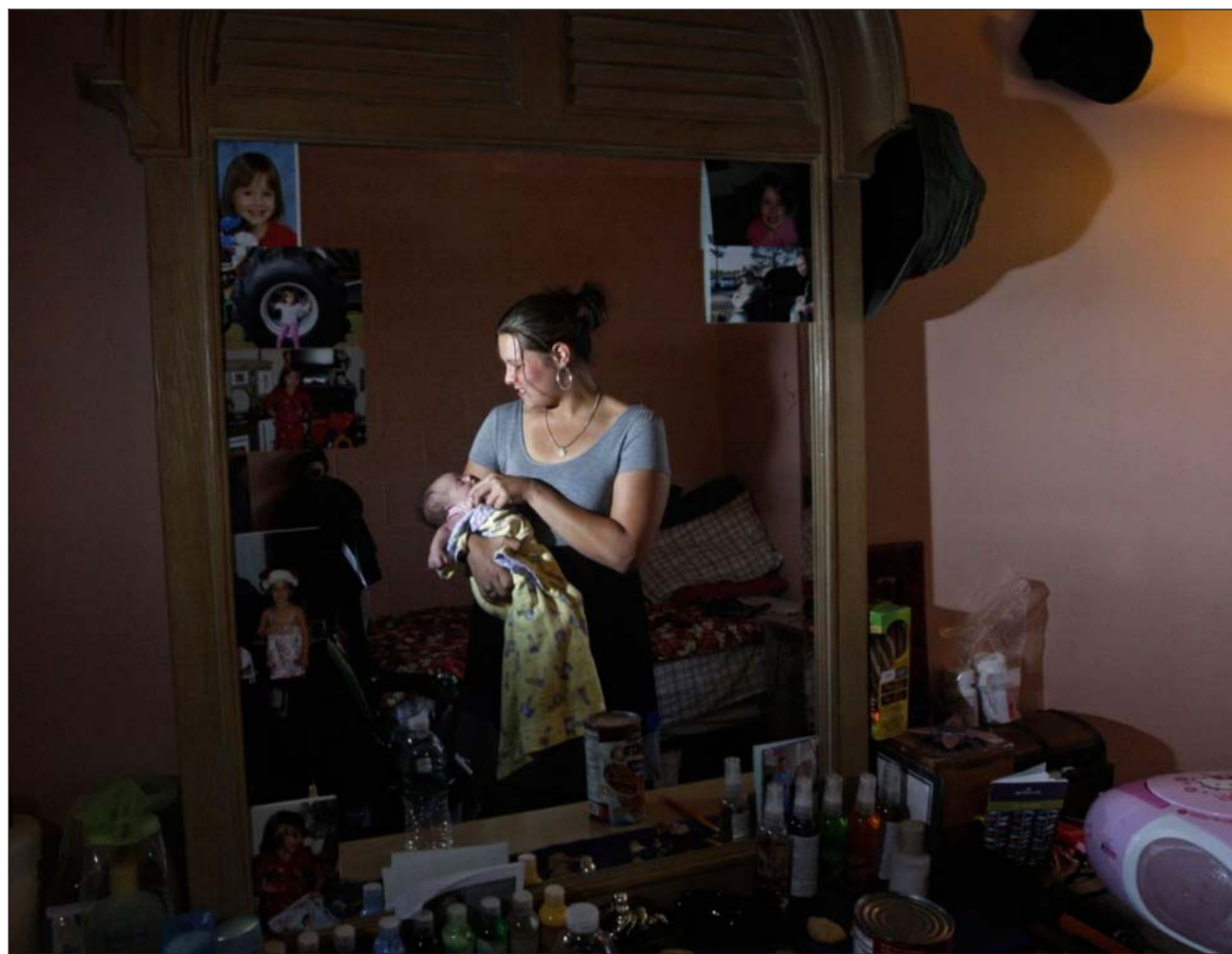
Mary Osuch, manager of the neonatal intensive care unit at Chris Evert Children's Hospital in Fort Lauderdale says they see two to three babies per quarter are treated for the withdrawal syndrome. "These are difficult situations. We have to talk to the mothers, without judging them, to get as much information as possible so we can help the babies."

Doctors first try to treat babies without drugs, often placing them in dark rooms away from other babies. They are swaddled and rocked or pushed in strollers.

If that isn't working, doctors may try a medical withdrawal. There's no universal standard for pharmacologically treating babies withdrawing from painkillers — although many hospitals rely on the Finnegan scale, a scoring system developed to aid in assessing the withdrawal symptoms and to help determine when to initiate treatment. Generally, hospitals turn to tiny doses of morphine, methadone, phenobarbital or clonidine to relieve symptoms and wean newborns off their addiction.

For babies who have tested positive, social workers or the Florida Department of Children & Families are usually called in. The response can range from case management to termination of parental rights in the most severe cases.

But the long-term effects on the babies remain unknown. Doctors hope that — like so-called crack babies — children exposed to prescription drugs will be able to rebound and suffer few, if any, long-term



**FAMILY TIME:** Nicole Montes is recovering from her oxycodone addiction at the Susan B. Anthony Recovery Center with her 2-month-old daughter, Kaitlyn (shown above and below), who was born clean.

consequences.

•••

For Clingan, the pregnant former insurance agent, the next chapter is still unknown. The addiction that began with a pain pill prescription after a car accident in 2009 eventually took her job and wrecked the stability of her family life.

She learned she was pregnant in November but kept using during her first trimester. She entered Susan B. Anthony in March and chose to leave the program last week though she hadn't broken any rules.

Clingan won't find out the damage done to her baby, if any, until she delivers in July. Either way, she promises to apologize to her baby boy for every pill she swallowed, snorted, injected.

"I knew my baby was



there, I could feel him. But it didn't matter because all I thought about was the pills," says Clingan, clean since March 6. "When I look back, it's like looking at a tornado and all you can see is destruction."

•••

Three months before her baby was born, Montes entered rehab to shake her oxycodone habit. The Fort Lauderdale mother and daughter have lived at Susan B. Anthony since Kaitlyn

was three days old.

Still hoping for a happy ending, Montes speaks in a sure voice about the chaotic world of oxycodone abuse, the stints in jail for petty crimes, the homelessness and the *other* daughter —

Kailey — whom she hasn't seen since April of last year.

Montes still remembers smoking pot during Kailey's first birthday party. She cannot remember much about Kailey's second birthday. And three days before Kailey's third birthday, Montes gave the toddler to her mother.

Montes was in treatment on Kailey's fourth birthday last month.

"Basically since she was born, I have been on something," says Montes. "When she cried, I didn't want to get up, I didn't spend time with her. I was too busy nodding out on the couch."

She took her first blue in 2008, the gift of a co-worker. It was the beginning of a headlong two-year fall.

By last spring, Montes had signed the papers granting temporary custody of Kailey to her mother in Royal Palm Beach. In June, while in jail on a shoplifting charge, Montes found out she was pregnant again.

She didn't stop using. "I had this really twisted way of thinking. I kept telling myself that I have to keep using because I didn't want her to go through withdrawal," she says. "Then I would turn around and cry, knowing I could be hurting her but I couldn't stop. It was like a demon inside me."

In November, five months pregnant and craving oxycodone, Montes attempted to rob a man in a Hollywood alley. He beat her up. Not long after, she finally faced the demon and entered a 21-day detox.

But Montes knew weaning herself from the drugs alone wasn't enough to stop a relapse. She needed more — counseling, motivation, support — to keep her from returning to the streets.

Almost three weeks before Christmas, Montes entered the Broward Residential Addiction Center in Coral Springs. She stayed until she delivered her second daughter on March 11. Kaitlyn was born clean.

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