Supporting Hospitals to Adopt the 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding

Preventing childhood obesity and promoting lifelong health begins with breastfeeding. Breastfeeding for at least six months decreases a baby’s odds of becoming overweight by more than 30 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hospital policies, procedures and staff can influence mothers and babies as they begin to breastfeed, and can affect long term and exclusive breastfeeding.

Eighty-eight percent of Vermont mothers breastfeed in the hospital. By six months, only one in four mothers are still exclusively breastfeeding their babies. Many mothers stop breastfeeding before they are ready, citing reasons related to their experiences in the hospital.

The hospital stay is a critical period for establishing maternal confidence in breastfeeding and laying the physiological foundation for breastfeeding success. Implementing hospital practices proven to better support mothers and babies can improve breastfeeding rates. The “10 Steps for Successful Breastfeeding” (endorsed by the national American Academy of Pediatrics) include:

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
2. Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Assist with initiation of skin-to-skin and breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation, even if they are separated from their infants.
6. Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breast milk, unless medically indicated.
7. Practice “rooming-in” — allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no pacifiers or artificial nipples to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.

Improving Hospital Policies and Practices

The Vermont Department of Health’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) partnered with the Vermont chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Academy of Family Physicians and the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program (VCHIP) to facilitate a quality improvement initiative focused on evidence-based maternity care practices. The goal is to increase exclusive breastfeeding rates at six months by assisting hospitals to adopt the “10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding”. Ten of Vermont’s 12 birthing hospitals are participating.

Project Goals

1. 100% of participating hospitals will have administrative support for participation
2. 90% of RN staff from participating hospitals will complete a 16 hour breastfeeding training
3. 100% of participating hospitals will have an updated or draft breastfeeding policy for all mother/baby units
4. 100% of participating hospitals will demonstrate appropriate use of infant feeding supplementation

10 Steps Self-Assessment

As a first step, project staff met with perinatal QI teams from each hospital to conduct a “10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding” self-assessment checklist. While most hospitals have steps 5, 7 and 8 well established on their mother/baby units, gaps in practice exist around steps 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10. And, although most hospitals have a written infant nutrition policy, the policy is not routinely communicated to staff. The hospital teams, with support from project faculty, worked to develop individual QI goals for their facility to strengthen current practices and address identified gaps in mother/baby care.

Birth and Beyond Breastfeeding Training

To support participating hospitals to meet the second project goal related to staff training, the project faculty and training team selected and adapted a curriculum used by California. The training was modified from the Birth and Beyond California curriculum, originally developed in collaboration with The Regional Perinatal Programs of California and Breastfeeding Taskforce of Greater Los
Angeles. Faculty and training team members include: Audrey Naylor, MD, DrPH, FAAP, FABM, Laura Murphy, MD, Anya Koutras, MD, IBCLC, Rebecca Goodman, MD, IBCLC, Dawn Kersula, MA, RN, IBCLC, FACCE, Tricia Cassi, BSS, IBCLC, Molly Rideout, MD, Jennifer Ustianov, BSN, RN, Kirsten Berggren, PhD, FNP, IBCLC, Patricia Berry MPH, Karen Flynn and Elizabeth Hunt, MD, IBCLC.

The 16 hour training was presented to five groups of maternity care nurses, reaching 149 of the 167 staff targeted (89%). In addition, a mix of 50 other staff attended the training including per diem nurses, Maternal and Child Health coordinators, medical students, and community partners. The 16 hour training provided an opportunity to learn best practices and delivered new knowledge and skills to promote, protect and support a mother’s decision to breastfeed. A Train-the-Trainer workshop for select staff was also provided to address the ongoing training needs of each facility.

**Momentum toward the Baby Friendly Hospital Designation**

Baby-Friendly is an international designation verifying that a hospital has comprehensively implemented the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding and the WHO Code of Marketing*, as established in the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital is renewing their Baby-Friendly Hospital designation and Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, Springfield Hospital, Rutland Regional Medical Center and Northwestern Medical Center will be working toward Baby-Friendly Hospital designation. This project will provide Vermont hospitals with important components required to achieve this designation.

**What health care providers can do…**

Community providers can also promote the “10 Steps for Successful Breastfeeding” as well as other policies and procedures that support the breastfeeding goals of families in your community.

- Provide prenatal breastfeeding education and support
- Provide postpartum breastfeeding support and referral
- Train staff in current evidence-based breastfeeding practices, offer anticipatory guidance and support and refer patients to an IBCLC and/or a WIC Peer Counselor

**Future directions**

Trainings are in development for primary care and pediatric providers and practice based nursing staff. If you have questions about availability of these trainings, please contact Karen Flynn at 652-4171 or Karen.flynn@state.vt.us