



### The Baby Friendly Initiative

# Breastfeeding training in the neonatal unit: a new approach

The strength of evidence associated with the benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies provides a watertight case for the importance of breastmilk and breastfeeding for all babies and preterm babies in particular. As survival rates for preterm infants improve, more attention is being focused on improving the quality of survival through optimal nutritional management.

The nutritional, anti-infective and developmental properties of human milk have been shown to be highly beneficial in helping with growth and protection of preterm babies<sup>1</sup> and its use is linked to a reduction in mortality and morbidity, and can be attributed to decreased lengths of hospital stays with associated reductions in healthcare cost<sup>2</sup>.

Necrotising enterocolitis (NEC) remains one of the most critical complications of prematurity, yet there is evidence to suggest that the use of breastmilk decreases the incidence and severity of NEC<sup>3</sup>. Breastmilk contains immunoglobulins (IgG), secretory IgA (sIgA), lactoferrin, gut growth factors and other protective substances that appear to promote growth of the intestine and strengthen its immunologic barrier<sup>4</sup>.

Breastfeeding also has long lasting health benefits for mothers and by providing milk for their babies within a neonatal setting, mothers can make a unique and invaluable contribution to their care. Many mothers report that being able to do this simple yet extraordinary thing helps them to overcome feelings of helplessness and isolation. However, despite the numerous advantages of breastmilk, its use is low in neonatal intensive care units in the UK<sup>5</sup>.

### Promotion

There is evidence to suggest that the support given to preterm breastfeeding mothers is far below acceptable standards within the UK<sup>6</sup> and national initiatives to improve preterm breastfeeding rates need to be put in place.

In 2009, the premature charity Bliss launched their Baby Charter Standards, which included strategies to ensure mothers receive practical support from skilled healthcare professionals to express breastmilk and achieve successful lactation. This strongly implies an emphasis on both education and training programmes for neonatal nurses.

The NHS Toolkit for High Quality Neonatal Services was published in 2009 by the Department of Health and provides evidence-based guidance for all neonatal services. The Toolkit calls for better support for breastfeeding and breastmilk expression and stresses the importance of ensuring staff caring for mothers and babies in the neonatal setting have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide this support. The Toolkit recommends that breastfeeding practice is audited against the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative standards, and demonstrates an annual increase in women initiating lactation and breastfeeding.

### UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative has provided a range of training courses to support healthcare professionals and other allied professionals to implement best practice standards within their workplace. The three-day course in Breastfeeding Management has been shown to deliver statistically significant improvements in knowledge, skills, confidence and attitudes among health professionals<sup>7</sup>.

Although a number of neonatal staff have attended this course and benefited from it, there has been a recognition that the course does not meet the specific needs faced by those staff who care for sick and preterm babies. To help address this, the Baby Friendly Initiative has developed a breastfeeding and lactation management course aimed specifically at neonatal staff.

### Course content

The new neonatal course takes place over three days with additional time required to complete a series of practical skills reviews which will help participants link the theory they learn on the course to practice within their workplace.

**Day One** of the course includes information regarding how the Baby Friendly Initiative standards apply within the neonatal unit. The health benefits of breastmilk and breastfeeding are explored together with information on constituents of breastmilk, donor milk and infant formula. An introduction to normal anatomy and physiology is followed up with discussions on how preterm birth affects this.

**Day Two** covers topics such as feeding development, alternative methods of feeding and the importance of kangaroo care. By the end of

the day participants should be equipped with the skills and knowledge to support mothers in successful initiation and maintenance of lactation through early, frequent and effective expression and appropriate transition to breastfeeding.

On **Day Three** participants will be encouraged to discuss the challenges faced by mothers and babies and explore ways to prevent and manage common problems with breastfeeding and lactation. There will be an opportunity to discuss the future of neonatal care with examples of progressive care from the UK and abroad.

The course has a strong family-friendly focus and woven throughout are images and voices of mothers and fathers talking about their experience. Further information on the course will be available at the annual Baby Friendly conference which will be held in Harrogate on 8 and 9 December.

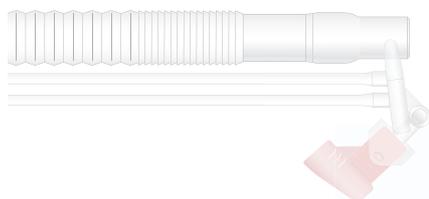
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7. **Dinwoodie K., Bramwell R., Dykes F.** The Baby Friendly breastfeeding management course. *Br J Midwifery* 2000; **8**: 362-66.

To discuss booking places on an open or in-house course, please email [bfi@unicef.org.uk](mailto:bfi@unicef.org.uk)

More details, including dates of forthcoming open courses, will be available on our website on [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)

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