

Access to breast milk in the first moments of life is critical

10th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium 2015

At Medela's Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium in Warsaw (17-18 April) over 450 delegates from 48 countries were reminded of the immeasurable value that breast milk provides for both preterm and term born infants.

The first series of presentations, 'Unique components of human milk', provided fascinating insight into the complexity of human milk. Associate Professor Donna Geddes and her colleagues at the University of Western Australia have been working to understand appetite control regulation and the effect that it has on the growth and body composition of the breastfed infant. There is strong evidence to suggest that a baby's early environment, including as a fetus in the womb, has a programming effect that can influence its health in later years. Anna Cannon, PhD candidate, has devoted a large part of her research to appetite control. While formula-fed infants often empty the bottle, breastfed infants only drink to their appetite due to control hormones such as leptin.

The discovery of stem cells in breast milk continues to attract a lot of attention and Dr Foteini Hassiotou, who is at the forefront of this research, spoke about their properties and potential.

A second series of presentations under the title 'Latest recommendations for research-based practice' focused on

translating research into practice.

Integrating milk supply as an essential part of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) process in Poland is one of Professor Maria Wilińska's priorities. Twelve guidelines have been published that include hospital staff training plans, rules for the handling of expressed milk, and the reasonable use of formula milk in hospitals. Professor Cindy Lee Dennis showed the audience how initiatives to foster exclusive breastfeeding could have a significant impact on the large number of children who perish every day as a result of malnutrition.

The ability of parents to care for their infant as soon as it is born is one of the key drivers for the future outcome of that child. Professor Matthias Keller underlined



Professor Christoph Fusch.



Associate Professor Donna Geddes.

the importance of family integrated care in the NICU and presented his NeopAss programme, which involves parents as active members of the team in the hospital.

In the final group of presentations 'The value of human milk in the NICU', Professor Christoph Fusch presented his ongoing research into individualised and targeted fortification, which if carried out properly can ensure that a preterm infant's full nutritional needs are met. Professor Dianne Spatz described the Breastfeeding Resource Nurse Programme that equips nurses with expert evidence-based lactation support that can be used at the bedside on a day-to-day basis. Her 'Ten steps programme' for promoting and protecting breastfeeding for vulnerable infants helps inform and educate parents in the NICU about the importance of human milk, and its role in medical intervention.

Taking on board learnings from Japan where formula milk is forbidden in the NICU, hospitals in Canada are working on policies to encourage the exclusive use of breast milk. Professor Shoo Lee shared the impact of this move, which has already seen a dramatic reduction of necrotising enterocolitis from 6% to 2.5% in Canadian NICUs.

There was resounding consensus on the need to ensure that all preterm babies have access to human milk from a medical, nutritional and growth perspective.



Speakers and delegates at the Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium.

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