

Coos Health & Wellness

Together, Inspiring Healthier Communities



August 19th 2016

Op-Ed Submission

Supporting Breastfeeding

Pregnancy and the delivery of a baby come accompanied by many new challenges and decisions. One being, “how am I going to feed my baby?” Most mothers want to breastfeed and in Oregon it is quite obvious with a breastfeeding initiation rate of over 90%. However, breastfeeding is often decreased or discontinued altogether in the weeks following birth due to a variety of barriers that women face.

There are many great reasons to breastfeed. Breast milk is the easiest for infants to digest, there is no preparation needed and it has all the right nutrients and calories that a baby needs. Breastmilk also provides growth factors that insure healthy development of organs, contains antibodies that protect against disease and infections. Breastfed infants are less likely to get ear infections, diarrhea, pneumonia, wheezing and other bacterial and viral infections. There is good evidence that breastfeeding may help protect against obesity, diabetes, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma, eczema, colitis and some cancers.

Breastfeeding isn't just beneficial for babies, it benefits moms too! When you breastfeed it aids your body in recovering from birth more quickly, helping the uterus return to its pre-pregnancy size and assisting in losing the weight gained during pregnancy. It also can delay the return of your menstrual period, keeping more iron in your body, reduce the risk of ovarian and breast cancer, help protect and strengthen bones to prevent osteoporosis.

The choice to breastfeed is a personal one and no mother should feel guilty for not being able to or choosing not to breastfeed. As a community we have many ways of supporting and helping the mothers that do want to breastfeed, succeed.

Achieving your breastfeeding goals can start with planning and talking about feeding. At WIC we ask every pregnant woman how they would like to feed their baby and we give them an opportunity to discuss their options. Talking with your partner, friends, doctor, family, employer and child care providers about your desire to breastfeed is a great first step. Breastfeeding can be tiring and sometimes difficult, so having supports around you will impact your feeding decisions.

In the community at large we also have many opportunities to support breastfeeding. Hospitals can implement practices in labor, delivery, postpartum care and in discharge planning that support mothers who want to breastfeed. Once women are home they need further follow-up from trained professionals to continue and overcome any difficulties. Bay Area Hospital's MOMS Program is a great example of this work both within the hospital and after discharge.

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Employer's support of breastfeeding can make or break a woman's choice to breastfeed. Many mothers return to work and if they want to continue breastfeeding they need worksite accommodations for pumping such as flexible breaks and schedules. Fortunately the Affordable Care Act (ACA) included a provision for employers to provide workplace accommodations that enable employees who are breastfeeding to express their milk. Employers need to provide reasonable, unpaid, break time for a mother to express milk in a place, other than a restroom, that is private and clean. These types of laws help shift community support and make it easier for women to make healthy choices for themselves and their families.

Another way to support breastfeeding is through organizational partnerships that coordinate care and referrals. At WIC we want women to know that they can come to us for breastfeeding advice and if they are having difficulties that are beyond our training we will refer them to the MOMs program or to your pediatrician. These referrals are key to helping moms feel confident about breastfeeding and to assess any issues early on so that they can be resolved.

WIC, the Perinatal Task Force and the Coos County Breastfeeding Coalition have recognized that there is a gap in support. Currently there is no place for mothers and families to meet and get peer breastfeeding support from one another. This is why starting Wednesday, August 24th "TLC – The Lactation Club" will be meeting from 4 to 6 pm at the Coos Bay library in the Cedar Room. This group is not limited to WIC families. Moms, pregnant women, partners, kids and other supports are welcome to attend. We will spend some time discussing breastfeeding topics but also it will be a chance for moms to ask questions and just share about their experiences. For pregnant women it is an opportunity to learn about the basics of breastfeeding and for new moms there will be a scale available to weigh babies. We will meet again on Wednesday September 21st and then continue to meet once a month on the 4th Wednesday of every month starting in October.

Whether you are a spouse, mother-in-law, friend, co-worker, or employer we can all help to normalize breastfeeding. For more information about WIC or TLC – The Lactation Club, call 541-751-2401, email or text WIC@chw.coos.or.us or come see us at Coos Health & Wellness, 1975 McPherson Avenue in North Bend.

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