

# Keeping abreast

Issue 3 Autumn 2003

## Regional Breastfeeding Conference 2003

Over 270 delegates attended this year's Regional Breastfeeding Conference on Tuesday 13 May in Armagh City Hotel during National Breastfeeding Awareness Week. The conference, entitled 'Overcoming the Challenges', is to date the largest, most prestigious breastfeeding conference to take place here. Delegates included midwives, health visitors, managers, breastfeeding coordinators, dietitians, a community paediatrician, educationalists, health promotion managers, Sure Start leaders and workers, community development officers, voluntary breastfeeding support groups, peer support mothers, and trainee breastfeeding counsellors from across Northern Ireland.

Janet Calvert, Regional Breastfeeding Coordinator, started the day with a presentation on developing a regional approach to promoting breastfeeding. She was followed by the key speaker Professor Mary Renfrew, Director of the Mother and Infant Research Unit at the University of Leeds, who provided two presentations. The first, on promoting breastfeeding in areas of social deprivation, identified programmes and initiatives that increase initiation and duration of breastfeeding among those least likely to breastfeed. The second presentation - an unusual topic for a breastfeeding conference - was entitled 'Helping to reduce the risks for formula-fed babies'. This talk examined the issue of lack of available evidence on best practice in showing parents how to prepare formula feeds.

Sue Ashmore, Deputy Programme Director for the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, provided a thought provoking yet practical presentation on avoiding unnecessary supplementation of breastfed babies in the early postnatal period. Dr Mary Hepburn provided a fascinating insight into her work in Glasgow in supporting breastfeeding among drug users. Her presentation was warm and often heart rending as she told us of the problems faced by women coping with deprivation and drug misuse.

Presentations on local projects were provided by Vera Kelso of Armagh and Dungannon Trust, Margaret Boyle and Mary Conway of Causeway Trust, Ann McCrea, Sperrin Lakeland Trust and Jackie Morton, Down Lisburn Trust. Dr Helen Ball of the University of Durham finished the day with a comprehensive look at breastfeeding, bedsharing and infant sleep.

Fascinating video footage was shown of parents and babies bedsharing, with insight provided into risk factors and the importance of developing guidelines on bedsharing. Delegates were also able to browse among the stands, including those from local projects and organisations such as Action Cancer, TAMBA, NIMBA and BEST Services.

We were delighted that so many of you were able to join us for the conference this year, and for those who were unable to attend, the PowerPoint slides which accompanied each of the presentations are available to download from the Breastfeeding section of the HPA website at [www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk). Next year's conference will be held on 11 May 2004 in Templepatrick, so put the date in your diary now!



The speakers from the Regional Conference on Breastfeeding which took place at Armagh City Hotel.

## New recommendation for six months' exclusive breastfeeding

During National Breastfeeding Awareness Week, Public Health Minister Hazel Blears announced the new Department of Health recommendations on breastfeeding duration. The new recommendation states "Breastfeeding is the best form of nutrition for infants. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months (26 weeks) of an infant's life as it provides all the nutrients a baby needs". The previous policy recommendation of introducing other foods to breastfed babies from four to six months therefore now becomes six months, based on evidence from the World Health Organization (WHO).

Key documents from WHO supporting exclusive breastfeeding include *The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding: A systematic review* and the *Global strategy for infant and young child feeding*.<sup>1, 2</sup> These documents have examined available evidence for developing and developed countries in relation to the timing of introduction of solids for breastfed babies. Experts looked at infant growth, iron status, morbidity, atopic disease, motor development, post-partum weight loss and amenorrhoea. Most significant was a reduction in incidence of gastrointestinal infection in a developed population among infants aged six months.<sup>3</sup> Studies included in the review also showed no observable deficits in growth among babies exclusively breastfed for six months. However, in developing countries where mothers may be severely malnourished, studies would suggest an increase in poor iron status among babies exclusively breastfed at six months.

### Implications for practice

All relevant health professionals will need information to help them to support parents to optimise their infant's nutrition. Currently, weaning literature for parents and professionals is based on the 1994 guidance from COMA.<sup>4</sup> All new policies, guidelines and parent information should include the new recommendation on six months' exclusive breastfeeding. Babies who are introduced to solid foods at six months may simply miss the puréed food stage completely or may progress through the stages of weaning more quickly. Advice on appropriate weaning foods remains the same.

It is recognised of course that some mothers may choose not to breastfeed exclusively for six months. Presently 10% of mothers here are still breastfeeding at six months and it is unknown how many are exclusively breastfeeding at this stage. In order to increase breastfeeding duration in Northern Ireland, parents must have access to accurate and consistent information, so that they can make informed choices about how they feed their babies.

### References

1. Kramer MS and Kakuma R. The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding: A systematic review. Geneva: WHO, Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, 2002.
2. World Health Organization. 54th World Health Assembly. Global strategy for infant and young child feeding. The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding. Geneva: WHO, Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, 2001.
3. World Health Organization. The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding: Report of an expert consultation. Geneva: WHO, Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, 2001.
4. COMA Working Group on the Weaning Diet. Weaning and the weaning diet. London: HMSO, 1994.

## Safer sleeping

UNICEF and the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths have teamed up to produce a revised edition of the UNICEF leaflet 'Sharing a bed with your baby'.

This leaflet gives important information to parents who want to bring their baby into bed with them. Bedsharing is linked with prolonging successful breastfeeding; however, in certain situations bedsharing should be avoided. It emphasises that parents should not bring their baby into bed to sleep if they smoke, have taken alcohol, drugs or medication that induces sleep or drowsiness. Parents are also warned not to sleep with their baby on a sofa.

The leaflet will be available free to hospitals which distribute Baby Welcome Packs. It can also be printed from the Baby Friendly Initiative website [www.babyfriendly.org.uk/bedshare.asp](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk/bedshare.asp)



# National Breastfeeding

Regionally media interest was good during and for several weeks after National Breastfeeding Awareness Week in May. For the first time, local materials were produced including a new antenatal leaflet, posters, and diary covers for health professionals. Several newspaper articles on the new leaflet and posters and on the health benefits of breastfeeding to mother and baby appeared throughout the national and local press.

The Regional Breastfeeding Coordinator, Janet Calvert, was featured with a mother and her breastfeeding baby on UTV. Janet also gave several radio interviews about the new materials and the important health benefits of breastfeeding.

## Local initiatives

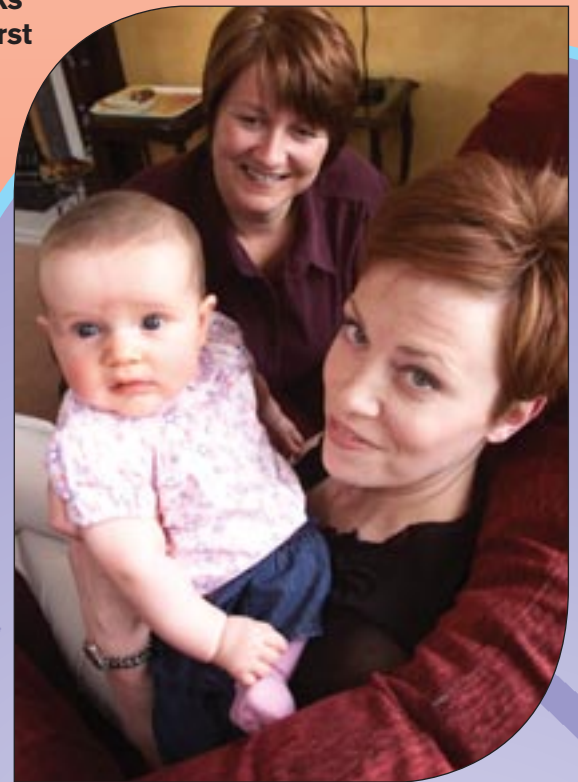
Staff and volunteers across Northern Ireland ensured that breastfeeding was high on the agenda in their local area during National Breastfeeding Awareness Week. At Altnagelvin Area Hospital, a quiz was held with prizes donated by a company which manufactures breastmilk storage bottles.

At Erne Hospital, a stand with posters and leaflets was placed at the entrance to the maternity ward, which generated a lot of interest. One of the midwives attended a cookery demonstration by Neville Maguire (Fermanagh's equivalent of the Naked Chef), where she distributed promotional pens and initiated a discussion on the importance of breastfeeding as baby's first food, which was very well received.

Health visiting staff from the Foyle Health and Social Services Trust collaborated with the local Sure Start health visitor in Shantallow Breastfeeding Support Group to raise the profile of breastfeeding. They invited Mark Patterson, the Radio Foyle/Ulster journalist, to the group on 12 May and he hosted his show from the centre, speaking to mothers and staff on the benefits of breastfeeding. Mark is very comfortable raising the issues and staff hope that he will keep this a regular slot every May. Local health visitor Anne Heard also organised a major breastfeeding awareness day in the Gasyard Healthy Living Centre on 8 March (International Woman's Day), to discuss the perceptions women in the city have about breastfeeding. The day was a huge success and a follow up to the event took place in July.

Staff at Causeway HSS Trust held a successful event at Ballymoney Health Centre entitled "A Celebration of Breastfeeding", which attracted over 30 mothers and babies. Refreshments were served and the mothers could also browse through stands set up by the National Childbirth Trust, La Leche League and Dental Health Promotion.

Breast is still best. Janet Calvert, Regional Breastfeeding Coordinator at the HPA, with mum Nicola Anderson, and baby Amy.



Celebrating breastfeeding at Causeway HSS Trust.

# Awareness Week

Craigavon and Banbridge HSS Trust (below) also had a successful week, with promotional stands in local shopping malls, coffee mornings in all facilities and opening of breastfeeding rooms in Portadown and Banbridge health centres.



The Mater Hospital Maternity Unit held a well-attended open afternoon on 15 May in the McAuley Building Atrium, to which mums, hospital staff, and community midwives were all invited. As well as poster displays, peer supporters were on hand to talk to the visitors, and baby massage and reflexology were demonstrated.

The North and West Belfast Health Promotion Consortium and the Royal Jubilee Maternity Services ran two competitions in local schools. The first, organised by community midwives from the Ballyowen Health Centre, invited pupils to design a poster promoting the benefits of breastfeeding. The second competition, also run by community midwives, asked pupils to come up with a name for the breastfeeding support group at the Shankill Health Centre. The winning entry was "The Magic Milk Club". Both competitions were well subscribed and the winners were rewarded with prizes donated by the Breastfeeding Steering Group at Royal Jubilee Maternity Services. Some of the pupils received a further insight into the benefits of breastfeeding when they attended a meeting of the breastfeeding support group in Shankill Health Centre on 14 May, while others came into the hospital the following day for the prize giving. The new breastfeeding posters and leaflets were used for displays in all wards and departments.

## Conferences and courses

### UNICEF UK BFI Conference

Purbeck Hall  
Bournemouth International Centre  
18-19 November 2003  
For details contact  
Liz Craig on 020 7312 7648  
or visit [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)

### Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland Annual Breastfeeding Conference

Maynooth  
20 February 2004  
For details contact  
Claire Allcutt on  
00353 18406489  
or [alci@iolfree.ie](mailto:alci@iolfree.ie)

### La Leche League of Ireland Conference

Arklow Bay Hotel, Arklow  
27-29 February 2004  
For details contact  
Siobhan Ward on  
00353 40441773  
or [siobhanward@eircom.net](mailto:siobhanward@eircom.net)

### Annual Regional Breastfeeding Conference

Dunadry Hotel, Templepatrick  
11 May 2004  
Guest speakers will include:  
Gabrielle Palmer, author of the book *Politics of Breastfeeding*,  
Jenny Warren, Scottish National Breastfeeding Coordinator,  
Genevieve Becker, Lactation Consultant and Dietitian,  
Marie Tims, Derby Sure Start.

# Breastfeeding peer support in North and West Belfast

Breastfeeding rates in North and West Belfast are among the lowest in the UK. Evidence suggests that combined with increasing knowledge to health professionals and adopting good hospital practices, peer support can help to increase breastfeeding rates. Five mothers have now completed a pilot Breastfeeding Peer Support programme in North and West Belfast. The programme was an objective of the breastfeeding project within the area to help promote and support breastfeeding. The five mothers will return to their established breastfeeding support groups and develop their skills with the support of the trained midwives who facilitate the groups.



Alison Carmile and Nathan, Sheila Murphy, Sinead Boyle and Ben, Cathy Karazumil and Joseph, and Brenda Finlay and Christopher after the Breastfeeding Peer Support programme.

Two of the mothers have also attended the UNICEF Baby Friendly breastfeeding management course, which they found complemented their existing knowledge. The fact that they were the only non-professionals on the course did not discourage them and they thoroughly enjoyed the training. The remaining three will be attending the same course in October. Breastfeeding coordinators Mary McCormack and Jacqueline Morton will support the group with regular meetings and the concept of peer support will be developed with the women as relevant to their area.

## Research report on breastfeeding in Northern Ireland

In 1999 two studies were commissioned by the Health Promotion Agency on behalf of the Regional Breastfeeding Strategy Group. The HPA has now published a summary report on the research.

### Key findings:

- Breastfeeding or having breastfed was more prevalent among older women and those classified as materially advantaged.
- 57% of the general public felt breastfeeding was better for babies, while 16% felt there was no difference between breast and bottle.
- 35% of the public said they found breastfeeding embarrassing, 7% offensive, and 6% distasteful, while 54% thought breastfeeding should always be in private.
- There was a general lack of awareness about the health benefits.
- The most common reasons given by mothers for not breastfeeding were "bottle-feeding is more convenient" and "never considered breastfeeding an option".
- 54% of mothers who had bottle-fed said they had not had any encouragement from health professionals, friends or family to breastfeed.
- 31% of women who had bottle-fed indicated they had not received information on breastfeeding from any source.

- 21% of women who had tried breastfeeding reported they needed more information.
- 81% of the public was supportive of an advertising campaign promoting breastfeeding.

This document is available in print from Janet Stange at the HPA, Tel: 028 9031 1611, or as a PDF file from the HPA's website at [www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)



## Other research in brief

### Evidence for the benefits of skin-to-skin contact

A review of 17 studies, involving 806 participants, has found significant benefits of early skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby on breastfeeding, behaviour and physiology in mothers and their healthy newborn infants.

Statistically significant and positive effects of early skin-to-skin contact were found in relation to breastfeeding incidence at one to three months of age, breastfeeding duration, maintenance of infant temperature in the neutral thermal range, infant blood glucose, infant crying and summary scores of maternal affection during an observed breastfeed within the first few days of the baby's life.

Anderson GC, Moore E, Hepworth J, Bergman N. *Early skin-to-skin contact for mothers and their healthy newborn infants (Cochrane Review)*. In: *The Cochrane Library, Issue 2 2003*. Oxford: Update Software.

### Six months' exclusive breastfeeding reduces gastrointestinal infections

Exclusive breastfeeding for six months is associated with a lower risk of gastrointestinal infection and no demonstrable adverse health effects in the first year of life.

An observational cohort study within a large randomised trial in Belarus compared 2,862 infants exclusively breastfed for three months (with continued mixed breastfeeding to six months) with 621 infants who were exclusively breastfed for six months.

When measured, weight and length gain between three and six months were slightly greater in the three month group, but the six month group had a faster length gain between 9 and 12 months and a larger head circumference at 12 months. A significant reduction in the incidence density of gastrointestinal infection was observed between the ages of three to six months in the six month group.

Kramer MS et al (2003). *Infant growth and health outcomes associated with 3 compared with 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding*. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78: 291-295.

**Keeping abreast** is published by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland on behalf of the Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Group.

The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the HPA.



### Editorial office

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland  
18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS  
Tel: 028 9031 1611 (Voice/Minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711  
Website: [www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)

## New Health Development Agency briefing

An important new document entitled *The effectiveness of public health interventions to promote the initiation of breastfeeding* was published by the Health Development Agency (HDA) in June 2003. It summarises existing review evidence and identifies gaps in breastfeeding research. There are a number of interesting findings from the review.

- Multi-faceted approaches using media, health education, training health professionals and changing hospital and government policies are most effective in increasing breastfeeding rates.
- Peer support programmes are effective when combined with media programmes, improvements within the health care sector and legislative changes.
- Promotion over both the antenatal and postnatal period, involving multiple contacts with a health professional or peer counsellor is effective.
- Peer support programmes are effective among women who express a wish to breastfeed, but not for women who have decided to bottle-feed.
- Women from low income backgrounds are more likely to gain the confidence to breastfeed if they see successful breastfeeding rather than talking or reading about it.
- Local media campaigns can be effective in improving attitudes to breastfeeding.

In Scandinavia, where breastfeeding rates are now around 98%, multi-faceted interventions have been implemented at national level for over 20 years, including:

- the production of problem-based information about breastfeeding, written for mothers and often by mothers. These materials have been read and used by health workers, and consequently more health workers breastfeed successfully;
- increased number of mother to mother breastfeeding support groups, therefore collectively more people succeeding with breastfeeding;
- increases in paid maternity leave with guaranteed return to previous employment;
- hospital practices changed substantially towards mother-infant contact and autonomy.

The review can be obtained from the HDA, PO Box 90, Wetherby, Yorkshire, LS23 7EX.  
Tel: 0870 1214194 or email [hda@twoten.press.net](mailto:hda@twoten.press.net)