



21 February 2007

Mrs Natalie McKeown

**Federal Enquiry into Breastfeeding**

**Submission to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Aging.**

I am a mother of a 2 year old boy. As a mother, I wish to contribute to this enquiry in a positive and encouraging way. I am not a health professional or an expert on breastfeeding but I am passionate about the value of breastfeeding not only to him and his future as a healthy adult but to myself and the wider community. I wish I could wave a magic wand and have all mothers breastfeeding today. Obviously there are the rare cases that it is not physically possible but to the majority it is.

My knowledge of breastfeeding was so little when I became pregnant that I felt ashamed that as an educated, career minded woman in my 30's I had never learnt anything about this essential part of what was ahead in my life.

I armed myself with everything I could get my hands on in relation to breastfeeding. I found classes to go to watch videos on "how to", "why" etc.

But I found myself asking why didn't I know this information? Why didn't I learn it at school or university? Why did I never read about it? I am aware of the risks of taking drugs, smoking or driving under the influence of alcohol or of not having a pap smear but I did not know any of the benefits gained from breastfeeding or the statistics showing the future consequences not only to the health of my child but to myself such a decreased risk of breast cancer.

I strongly believe that a Public health campaign should start in our country's education system. Why not educate our future adults and leaders in the same way we educate them on the importance of exercise, nutrition and safe sex? We need them to be informed so as to limit the extent of the negativity surrounding breastfeeding and to teach them that it is not a "taboo" subject. It is normal!

A public health campaign should also be aimed at the community as a whole. So often it is complete strangers who have provided their input to my breastfeeding when they obviously knew none of the facts about its benefits. Give them the facts and statistics too. If only some of our grandparents and parents could talk about this so called "taboo" subject they could be informed enough to encourage their children in the early days of parenthood when it all seems so overwhelming and the easy way out is to buy their infants' food off a shelf. Breastfeeding is free, convenient, the right temperature, can be stored as expressed milk and is natural.

Funding for breastfeeding is essential – for education, changing public perceptions, training counsellors who can be contacted at the hours that a new mother needs it most i.e. the middle of the night!!. Health professionals are often the ones I would turn to when in need and I have only ever received positive support from them.

Advertising of processed infant milk formulations should be brought under control and made to adhere to the same standard that any manufacturer of a food product is. It is unethical for suppliers to promote their products as “the closest thing to breastfeeding”. This is misleading and only adds to the complexities a new parent faces. The only thing close to breastfeeding is BREASTFEEDING. Nothing compares.

I have never submitted my thoughts to a Federal enquiry before but felt compelled to put some of my frustrations and concerns on record.

Kind regards

Mrs Natalie McKeown