



To the Secretary of the Committee on the Inquiry into Breastfeeding,

I am a mother of 2 children, aged 3 and 18 months, and I am tandem nursing them at present. I want to write briefly about some experiences I recently had in the public health system that impacted on my breastfeeding.

I was recently admitted to hospital. During my stay I found the knowledge of specialist staff and nurses about breastfeeding to be completely inadequate. Here are some examples of my experiences:

1. The first specialist I saw was appalled I was breastfeeding an 18 mth old child (so I never mentioned the 3 year old). I was instructed to stop feeding immediately, and to feed the 18 mth old all of the expressed breastmilk I had pumped as soon as I got home. Unfortunately this breastmilk was contaminated by medications I was given in hospital - and these caused my daughter to fall, stumble and have poor balance for the day. We didn't realise until later the link with the medication and the expressed breastmilk.
2. I was seen in two different hospitals. Although breastfeeding was completely unrelated to my illness I was advised continually that I would have to wean my children immediately. I asked to see a lactation consultant and this request was refused. I was allowed to borrow the breast pump twice from maternity unit - after which the nursing staff would not allow me to pump milk anymore. I was frequently spoken to rudely and treated harshley because of my desire to continue to breastfeed.
3. When discharged I was told my desire to breastfeed indicated a "difficult personality" and was symptomatic of "underlying emotional issues". I was told I was being "selfish and controlling" because I desired to breastfeed my children.
4. After being discharged I sought the services of a lactation consultant from a different hospital. I gave her consent to obtain my medical history. After extensive conversations with those involved in my treatment she advised me that breastfeeding was unrelated to my illness, and was definitely not a causal factor. Further, she agreed with me that it was not a good time to wean and I needed to be supported to continue breastfeeding. My husband and I visited her for an appointment. Unfortunately, my husband - who had never had a problem with me breastfeeding before I became ill, had been thoroughly convinced by Queensland Health staff that my desire to breastfeed was "perverted" and "selfish". The lactation consultant spent time educating my husband about the benefits of breastfeeding and extended breastfeeding. She was very supportive and was appalled at the wrong information and inadequate treatment I received.

In my opinion, all health professionals need updated knowledge about breastfeeding. These people are in positions of power and are undermining womens' ability to breastfeed their children. This situation I experienced was devastating for our family. It was demoralising and degrading. I was ill. However, I felt ongoing pressure to advocate for my right to continue to breastfeed my children. I am shocked that health professionals know so little about breastfeeding and are completely uneducated about the increasingly common practice of extended breastfeeding and tandem nursing.

I welcome the inquiry into breastfeeding, and hope that changes are made on the ground, in the health care systems to encourage women to do what is natural and healthy for them and their children: breastfeed them for 2 years and beyond - as long as they are all still enjoying the experience.

Yours sincerely,
Crystal Poggioli