

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Health and Aging

I am the mother of three children now aged six to eleven. My story is one of breastfeeding success, it has not been without hurdles, but I have not had the challenges that I hear from so many other mothers. As I reflect on what helped me on my journey I realise there are several important factors that contributed to my success.

- When I had my first child I was lucky to have a newly qualified lactation consultant as my primary nurse. As this nurse was second in charge she was in a position where she could influence how things were done on the ward. The staff worked together to ensure each mother was given up-to-date information and was supported to get breastfeeding initiated. As I'd had a caesarean I had a longer than average stay, however my daughter had spent 3 days in special care and time under lights for jaundice on the ward. I went home on day six feeling confident that I could continue breastfeeding.

With each subsequent birth the situation was progressively worse, the information given conflicted or was inaccurate and when I needed assistance following each caesarean it was often unhelpful. I could understand where other mothers, who comment that hospital staff are confusing, were coming from. The 'lactation expert' on the recently televised 'Life at One' (ABC) perfectly demonstrated the poor assistance that mothers are given by supposedly qualified people.

Short stays and a lack of accurate, empathetic advice do not allow mothers to leave hospital prepared to breastfeed. A greater number of better qualified staff and longer hospital stays would increase birthing costs, but the health savings in the long term.

- By the time my eldest child was three months old I had joined the Australian Breastfeeding Association (then the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia). Attending group meetings meant that I had the support and information that this wonderful organisation provides. As each subsequent hurdle presented itself I was already armed with the tools I needed to tackle it. The Australian Breastfeeding Association provides the mother to mother support that our present culture no longer provides.

Increasing community knowledge about breastfeeding would help support each breastfeeding partnership.

- I have an extended family who believe that bottle-feeding is not comparable with breastfeeding and whilst their information was not always correct their support was consistent. Other mothers are not as fortunate and there are many pressures to 'give-up' when breastfeeding is not going to plan. The promotion of baby formulas often undermines mother's confidence in their ability to feed their children. I have noticed that those mothers I know who have been exposed to infant formulas more frequently in their work lives before their children's births have more readily used formula. Those friends who have worked in pharmacies and supermarkets have readily supplemented and substituted formula. If advertising of formula did not increase sales the companies would not invest such large amounts promoting them. Many mothers believe that formula is just as good as breast milk and that 'toddler milks are superior to breast milk.

The advertising of infant formulas in Australia needs to be reviewed.

I look forward to seeing the outcome of the inquiry.

Emma Radel

16/03/2007