

Diana Royds

17th March, 2007

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding

I trained and then served as a lactation counsellor for nine years with Parents Centres Australia from 1978 to 1987; mostly working as a telephone counsellor, but also as a guest speaker for pre-natal groups on a regular basis. I have two sons, both of whom were breastfed; the first (before I trained as a counsellor) for 9 months and the second who self-weaned at 3 years of age.

What alarms me is that the same misconceptions held by many people in those pre-natal groups years ago, appear to remain as prevalent today. Most recently I was disappointed to hear (again), stories from mothers of newborns who'd given up breastfeeding within a week of leaving hospital stating the following reasons;

- Inverted nipples (this from an experienced registered nurse).
- Couldn't get the baby to settle.
- Told by her paediatrician, that she probably didn't have enough milk, so should just switch to formula.
- Told by a baby health clinic nurse that she was overfeeding (breast) and needed to "get the baby into a routine".

It is very frustrating to hear healthy women, insist that they cannot breastfeed their infants and to witness this being reinforced by those around them including health professionals; and one can only assume that these women do not have the information or are not convinced about the real (and proven) advantages both to their own health and that of their babies offered by breastfeeding.

So how to address this health issue? I would like to propose the following initiatives;

- Educate girls and boys** (before they become sexually active) in high school via their science or health subjects by adding the process of the "let down reflex" to the curriculum. It makes for fascinating reading and truly gives the student an understanding of the whole "supply and demand" principle, which ensures that the breasts automatically produce enough milk for the individual baby.

*** During discussions with the men at pre-natal talks, I couldn't help but note that often their support and attitude to breastfeeding influenced their wives/partners determination to succeed with breastfeeding, so we shouldn't leave the boys out of the information loop.*

- In the same way that the general public has taken on board the information regarding smoking, obesity and (most recently) global warming — it's clear that old long held misconceptions can be overcome, given a blanket of media coverage. So let us find the finance and the will to present and promote breastfeeding with all its health benefits to the community through all media available.
- I understand that ABA has proposed running courses on breastfeeding whereby health workers can gain professional accreditation — this should certainly be embraced and encouraged for anyone dealing with mothers and infants in their work.
- Provide funding for an increase in trained breastfeeding counsellors (perhaps attached to suburban Baby Health Clinics) to allow them to make house calls to new mothers until successful and confident feeding has been established

Thank you for your attention.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Royds". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diana Royds