

Submission no. 381AUTHORISED: 13/6/07 *R*

G'day,

I read an interesting article on the Huggies Website regarding information gathering regarding the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, parliamentary inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding. As per the information provided, please see my comments below, against each criteria listed:

• **The extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding**

This is a tricky one to ascertain without long term, medical surveillance of a large group of babies, also factoring in other external factors such as the health of parents, home environment (smoking, non smoking, junk food vx home cooked meals etc). I can only provide anecdotal information in regards to my daughter who was 2 years old in April and was breastfed until 14 months old. We have a very healthy environment and consciously healthy parents. My daughter did not get sick at all, until her first mild cold at 10 months old. Even upon commencing part time kindy at 12 months, she was rarely ill and generally only gets one bout of the local bug, for example, gastro, before seemingly building an immunity to it and the bug then skipping her next time it goes through the kindy environment. What we have noticed, is that we will receive a warning that a bug has gone through kindy, like gastro, and our daughter will not get sick, however my husband or I will pick it up. I can only assume that our daughter has a strong immune system as continues to remain very healthy. Now whether that is linked to her being breastfed or simply luck, who really knows.

• **Evaluate the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities**

Having successfully breastfed until 14 months, I did not have to purchase any breast milk substitutes. I did have an issue with my nipples so I used nipple shields full time from 2 months on, with great success, despite the lack of support from the Breast Feeding Association and continued negativity. There is always an exception to the rule I suppose. The cost was approximately \$6 per month, which is certainly not an expensive outlay in comparison to ceasing breastfeeding and switching to formula and bottles.

• **The potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding**

As previously mentioned, my only issue with the recent comments in regards to breastfeeding increasing health issues, in particular allergies, is adequate research and test groups. There are so many external factors which are often debated, such as breastfeeding mothers who smoke, drink alcohol, have a less than adequate diet, do not exercise and of course, environmental factors such as pollution, water quality etc. A question that always has to be asked, is who is driving such research and does that in anyway taint the results, such as formula companies pushing the movement that breastfeeding is now 'bad' for children.

• **Initiatives to encourage breastfeeding**

Education, education and more education. It needs to, and often does on a voluntary basis with breastfeeding workshops within the antenatal system. There needs to be on-going,

28/05/2007

consistent support during the stay in hospital after birth of the child, and then within the first month at home. Such services I experienced in Canberra included the 'Mid Call' service which was outstanding. The only issue I have is the inconsistency of support and messages from midwives and related professionals. I find often they can not turn off their personal beliefs which often taints the level of support, particularly if they could not breastfeed their own children or simply don't want to. First time mothers in particular, are very vulnerable so midwives need to maintain a consistent message, not just within their state, but the entire country. While I have the opportunity, I would like to mention that in all the classes I had and reading material, I was never really warned or prepared for how hard breastfeeding is. The majority of the messages were 'its natural' and will 'come naturally' etc. This is far from the case for most mothers, so I would like to see a more matter of fact educational programme with concentrated efforts on the processes and routines.

• **Examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding**

Hmmmm. This is such a vicious cycle where at times, there is lots of support, and at others, like now, there is nominal support. I think the facilities provided in public are excellent these days, a real bonus. There is a real rift between mothers who breast feed, and those that don't and I'm not sure its some-thing that can ever be overcome. Personally, I think majority of the difficulties for promoting breastfeeding, is driven from people who can or have not done it successfully. In the pro breastfeeding swing of recent times, bottle feeding has been painted in such a negative light that these parents have naturally been pushed to resent those who have successfully breastfed, who then in turn, are pushed into a corner defending their choice and ability to do it. At the end of the day, I believe its all driven by money and power, predominately by the companies that manufacture breast milk substitutes.

• **The impact of breastfeeding on the long term sustainability of Australia's health system**

As previously stated, this isn't a simple question - in fact, there are many, many shades of grey. If there can be adequate, non politically driven testing to determine the true facts regarding the future health impacts of breast vx bottle fed children, then I think you will be in a better position to respond to this appropriately. This of course, will take many, many years and no doubt, have complex outcomes, rather than any kind of 'yes' or 'no' outcome. I do hope that research is looking into additional factors such as the environment, parent health etc.

My personal contact details are as follows, should you require additional information to which I am more than happy to provide:

Kindly,