

Submission by Madeleine Love,

To the Committee for Health and Aging, Inquiry into Breastfeeding:

Mother-Baby "Sleep Centre" experiences - harm impact on breastfeeding

The experience of a new mother (who now lives in Benalla):

The woman had been sent home from hospital before her milk was "in". She put her baby on the breast when he cried. At 6 days, she began to think there was a problem, and took him to a rural city Mother-Baby centre (on a Sunday). The centre told her that her 6 day old son was just "putting in on", to take him home and let him cry it out. At ten days the mother had a very bad feeling, and rushed off to the chemist to get infant formula, feeding him immediately. She was able to see a M&CH nurse the next day. Her son had lost a great deal of weight - she was told he may have died if she had not given him the formula - her milk had not come in.

Retrospectively it was supposed that the milk failure was due to the medication she was on for a heart condition. The medication had been considered at the birth, but its impact on breastfeeding had not been considered. The experience was very bad, and she did not have the confidence to try breastfeeding again with her second child, even in the absence of medication. The hospital should not have sent her home. The Mother-Baby centre should be charged with negligence.

My Experience

As a new mother I was committed to breastfeeding and desperate to be successful, but after repeated bouts of infective mastitis my M&CH nurse recognized an urgent case and sent me to a Melbourne centre for Mothers and Babies, in the hope that they could find a solution.

However the staff at the centre simply told me that "I was a woman prone to mastitis" (this was already obvious). They made no effort to find a solution. (All they actually appeared to do was to put babies through "sleep programs".) I could not face a future of continual mastitis - they were "the Experts". I gave up. The centre supplied me with infant formula, which I fed to my eight week old. I walked out of the centre with a free sachet, and a bottle. I stopped at a chemist on the way home and bought three more bottles, and a tin of formula. This was a terrible outcome.

But I was lucky...throughout the weaning process I continued to offer my baby comfort feeds at the breast. After about four weeks (having suffered no more mastitis) I began to have renewed confidence, and weaned him off the infant formula. I continued to breastfeed without any further bouts of mastitis for years, and had more children, fed similarly, with no further experience of infective mastitis (eleven+ mastitis-free years of breastfeeding).

Retrospectively I consider the mastitis to be primarily the result of iatrogenic (well-meaning) advice from my M&CH nurse very early in new motherhood, and very bad books written in the breastfeeding-hopeless nations of the UK and the USA.

The experience of a mother from a new mother's group:

There were six mothers in a new mother's group. Five of the mothers had taken their babies to the local "sleep centre" when the babies were young. They all stopped breastfeeding early. The sixth (my correspondent) had the baby in a cot next to her bed (with the side down), continued to feed the baby quietly (and easily) in the night, and was still breastfeeding at 12 months.

The experience of a young women whose baby did not feed/sleep/play according to the rigid schedule of the sleep centre:

The young woman took her 8 week old to a mother-baby sleep centre. Her baby did not sleep in the prescribed manner so the mother was put on drugs to increase her milk supply, which she continued to take throughout the lactation period. While I'm very glad the woman breastfed, it is likely that drugs were an iatrogenic prescription to meet an iatrogenic schedule. This cannot be good. The woman passed on the name of this "wonder drug" to another who was trying to meet such a prescribed schedule. I'm concerned about the impact of such drugs on mother and baby.

Summary

The vast majority of breastfed babies do not adopt any regular "schedule" by nature. To suggest to a mother that babies should behave "regularly" gives a mother two ways to see her non-conforming situation - either, that she is a bad mother and needs to learn skills (usually leading to breastfeeding failure), or, that she has bad milk and should put her baby onto infant formula. The presence and promotion of sleep centres promotes these erroneous conclusions. Sleep Centres are institutionalized breastfeeding failure centres.