

Submission no. 470

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To Whom It May Concern:

Many of the difficulties new mothers have with breastfeeding could be addressed by increasing the amount of help provided by midwives and lactation consultants both in hospital and in those first critical weeks at home. I received very little help in the hospital due to understaffing and when help did arrive it was often after more than 30 minutes of trying to get my son to feed unsuccessfully which usually resulted in both of us in tears. Teaching a new mother to breast feed when she is having difficulty requires an enormous amount of patience and understanding both of which seem to be in short supply in overworked midwives. In most cases a mother's milk has not "come in" by the time she and the baby leave hospital and thus many new mums are struggling with the breastfeeding process at home with no-one to help. I think at a minimum new mothers should receive at least three home visits in the first few weeks to address feeding problems and alleviate the new mother's anxiety. In my case I left hospital without breastfeeding being established correctly and we faced an extremely difficult and emotional time at home trying to establish the process. A visit to a lactation consultant in the following week did nothing to assist the problem as my son was not interested in feeding at the time of the appointment. In the end it was the use of a nipple shield which assisted us in breastfeeding but this was criticized by the lactation consultant. We used this device for a number of months before my son was able to latch on correctly.

I think a second issue that needs addressing is weight gain in newborn babies and the pressure mothers feel to have their baby follow the growth curve. In my son's case his weight dropped to the lowest percentile of the curve (both the standard curves and the new WHO-issued curves) and I was subjected to much pressure from the local area health service midwife to address the "problem". I know other mothers in this situation who have supplemented with formula when their baby has "failed" to maintain his "correct" weight for age. From what I understand the curves currently issued have no relevance to breast-fed babies and should not be included in the health record book. Unless there is a medical reason for intervening, the pressure on mothers to have their babies follow these curves should be removed. It should be remembered that it takes all types to make these curves in the first place.

Kind regards,
Amanda

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