Collaboration and Commitment Results in More Baby-Friendly Hospitals

Collaborations among hospitals have been shown to improve breastfeeding support and care. Working together, staff from hospitals, medical centers, and public health agencies address common barriers by sharing information, pooling resources, and creating and implementing common quality improvement procedures.

Recently, local, regional, and statewide collaboratives have formed throughout California in response to disparities in breastfeeding rates. Successful hospital consortia in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Joaquin counties demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.

Breastfeeding Can Reduce Health Disparities

- Breastfeeding is a crucial first step in protecting the health of mothers and infants; hospital policies and practices have an enormous impact on infant-feeding success.\(^1\)\(^3\)
- Hospitals that have instituted Baby-Friendly practices have the highest rates of breastfeeding.\(^4\)\(^6\) These evidence-based reforms must reach hospitals serving the state’s poorest families.
- The Joint Commission and state and federal agencies are monitoring breastfeeding rates and obstetric interventions in California hospitals; outdated institutional policies that create disparities in health care are no longer acceptable.

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Marin County: 2011 Data

Marin County In-Hospital Breastfeeding Rates, 2011

The UC Davis Human Lactation Center used data reported by the California Department of Public Health Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Program to create the following charts showing in-hospital breastfeeding rates.\(^9\)

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Barriers to Policy Improvement Can Be Overcome

Recent state and federal policy benchmarks confirm growing public expectation that hospital environments should fully support breastfeeding.

The number of Baby-Friendly hospitals in California has increased dramatically, from only 12 in 2006 to 55 in June 2012, yet only about 21 percent of the hospitals in the state are Baby-Friendly. More work is needed to ensure that all hospitals are providing the best possible care to mothers and babies.

The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative focuses on ten hospital policies, or “steps,” designed to reduce barriers to exclusive breastfeeding (www.babyfriendlyusa.org).

The Joint Commission, an organization that accredits and certifies hospitals, adopted the Perinatal Care Core Measures in 2010. This set of five measures includes rates of exclusive breast milk feeding, as well as elective deliveries and cesarean sections, which may affect in-hospital breastfeeding rates (www.jointcommission.org/perinatal_care/).

Hospital policies that do not directly support exclusive breastfeeding are not only outdated, but fail to reflect what is now considered standard, high-quality care.

Marin County Breastfeeding and Hospital Performance

- County average breastfeeding rates:
  - Any – 98.6%
  - Exclusive – 81.9%
- Ranked 9th in the state for exclusive breastfeeding