

Breast is best – at work and home

Health Promotion is working on a challenging new project to increase the duration of breastfeeding among new mothers. Breastfeeding is identified as a national public health priority, yet breastfeeding duration in NSW is well below current recommendations.

The World Health Organisation recommends that babies should be breastfed exclusively for the first six months of life. In NSW only 25% of babies are fully breastfed to four months and 5% to six months of age.

"As a first step we needed to explore the issues, identify current local support for breastfeeding and the best ways to increase the duration," Beth Stickney, a researcher with the Health Promotion Service said. "We spoke to almost 20 health professionals and academics from around Australia with an interest in breastfeeding and 13 stakeholders from within the Area Health Service."

The stakeholders included child and family health nurses, lactation consultants, midwives, GPs in Ante-Natal Shared Care programs and parenting groups. An advisory committee with representatives from across the Area was established to guide the project.

The research identified the main issues as:

- ▶ consistency of breastfeeding information;
- ▶ co-ordination of effort; and
- ▶ collaboration by all health and consumer organisations involved in breastfeeding.

The three main outcomes of the project so far are:

Consistent data collection: data on breastfeeding has now been included in the Families First data collection by Child and Family Health nurses, which means that the same set of information is now available across the Area Health Service.

"Having a clear picture of what is happening across the Area makes it easier to develop strategies to address some of the issues," Andy Bravo, a co-ordinator of the Breastfeeding Project said.



Shared care protocol: the St George Division of General Practice is now working with the Area Lactation Group to develop a breastfeeding protocol for GPs caring for women as part of Shared Care programs. The protocol will strengthen the communication between GPs, health services and the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Parenting groups: opportunities to expand the existing Open Early Parenting groups are being reviewed in association with Families First. The groups, facilitated by Child and Family Health nurses target parents with babies from one to eight weeks of age. A more flexible approach is being considered which provides parents with the opportunity to discuss breastfeeding and other new parent issues.

The Future

The next stage of the project will look at breastfeeding and work for women based on the Randwick Hospital Campus. "Many women are returning to work within six months of giving birth," Andy Bravo said. "We'll look at their needs and the potential to increase support for those who want to combine breastfeeding and paid work."

"We'll also be working with vulnerable groups including young women, those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people who don't usually access health services to increase breastfeeding peer support and links with health services." *



This month we highlight an important health issue, breastfeeding. Health Promotion has been working throughout the Area on breastfeeding, and as the project moves into its second year the focus is on breastfeeding in the workplace.

Breastfeeding has significant benefits for mothers, employers and most importantly babies. An organisation that supports breastfeeding in the workplace will experience reduced absenteeism, increased productivity,

lower staff turnover and the positive corporate image of a family friendly workplace. The benefits for mothers include a healthier baby, less time off work, maintenance of job skills, better health and reduced costs. The benefits to babies include access to the perfect food source that is more easily digested, less illness and continuance of a special bond.

We look forward to working with organisations across the Area Health Service to address long term health issues affecting our community. *

Jo Mitchell
Director of Health Promotion

Breastfeeding Project team

Beth Stickney is a research and evaluation co-ordinator with the Health Promotion Service. Her main project areas are breastfeeding and physical activity.

Beth supports development of health worker skills by teaching public health nutrition and health promotion program evaluation within the Area and at the University of Sydney.

Beth previously worked as deputy director of the NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition and as a researcher in the Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Sydney. She has a Bachelor of Science, Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics and a Master of Public Health. She is married with two young boys and spends her (limited) spare time following the local soccer team and co-ordinating her boys' school canteen.

Andy Bravo is a public health nutritionist with the Health Promotion Service. Andy has been working in Health Promotion for thirteen years and her current main area of interest is breastfeeding. Previously, Andy led the groundbreaking Good Food in Family Day Care project, which



Beth Stickney



Andy Bravo

resulted in significantly improved nutrition, food safety and policy standards for children in care. The information kit and training support from the project were replicated across the state.

Andy has a Post Graduate Diploma in Dietetics and an Honours Degree in Nutrition from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Andy is married with two young girls. She is an accomplished cook and regular netball cheer squad participant. *

Gender and equity in health



The Population Health Division recently organised a Forum focused on Gender and Equity in Health. The Forum was attended by almost 70 South East Health staff.

Dr Toni Schofield, University of Sydney and Assoc. Professor Trish Davidson, University of Western Sydney both spoke at the event on gender issues, equity and health outcomes. Both speakers concluded

that in advancing a gendered approach to health, consumers need to be able to have their say and health programs should be customised to the specific population group, not necessarily based on gender.

The event was hosted by the Women's Health Unit and the Health Promotion Service. *

Happenings



Walk to Work Day: Health Promotion is encouraging all staff to leave the car at home, unblock some arteries and be part of Walk to Work Day on Friday November 5. Walk to Work Day is organised by the Pedestrian Council of Australia.

Staff update: The Tobacco and Health Program welcome Jacky Hony back to the team part-time after a year's secondment to the communication and marketing co-ordinator role. Jacky's tobacco related work will focus on providing training for smoking cessation to other health workers, developing resources and other promotional work to support the Smoke Free Health Service Policy.

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