



The Secretary of the Committee
on the Inquiry into Breastfeeding,

House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600.

23rd February 2007

To Sir/Madam,

I am a mother of 3. I have 4 ½ years of breastfeeding experience and I am currently feeding my 5 month old daughter. I feel that I am not lucky to be able to breastfeed because the human body is designed to do it. I am lucky enough to have had the right support at the right times to be able to have successfully breastfed for so long. That support has included my family; I grew up in a family where breastfeeding was the norm. My mother breastfed and so did the majority of her friends. As a child that is all that I saw. I also have had the fantastic support of other mothers who were in my Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) group. And of course the wonderful support from my husband, one of the strongest breastfeeding advocates I know. It worries me though that other mother's do not have this support.

We are currently experiencing low breastfeeding rates, much lower than a country as fortunate as ours should have. And I hear of many mothers who are being told the benefits of breastfeeding but this is not being backed up by practical support when they get home. They then often feel guilty as this is nearly always one of a mother's emotions when thinking about anything related to their children. But mother's should not feel guilty, they should feel angry because at present our society lets these mothers down with inadequate breastfeeding support systems. It is a fact that **ninety percent of mothers want to breastfeed and if 99 per cent of women's bodies are physically capable of breastfeeding then what is going wrong!**

I believe there are a number of reasons:

1. Mothers and fathers are not supported.
2. There is no continuing breastfeeding education for health professionals, including GPs.
3. Formula companies are still advertising and making false health claims about their products.
4. The WHO Code has not been implemented sufficiently. The MAIF agreement is weak.
5. People still believe that formula is equivalent to breastmilk or that it isn't that harmful.

6. Government is not financially supporting the work of the Australian Breastfeeding Association.
7. Society can still be unaccepting of breastfeeding in public.
8. Practices in many hospitals do not support breastfeeding.
9. Breastfeeding is not considered the normal way to feed a baby.
10. Breastfeeding beyond 12 months is socially unacceptable even though the World Health Organisation recommends breastfeeding for 2 years and beyond.

It is vital that we start educating parents and the public about the importance of breastmilk and not just its benefits. This includes informing the public about the real dangers of formula. Breastmilk is the biologically normal way to feed a baby. Our bodies are designed to have it so of course there will be problems if a human body does not receive it. There needs to be a public education campaign to educate the general public about the importance of breastfeeding, the health implications of artificial feeding, the rights of mothers to feed in public and that breastfeeding an older baby or child is important and acceptable.

One of the biggest complaints mother's have when they go to start breastfeeding their child is that they are given a wide variety of advice and that often that advice, they find out later, is out of date or just plain wrong. Midwives, child health nurses and GPs need to be continually educated about breastfeeding. Unfortunately many GPs know very little about breastfeeding because it isn't part of their training. And there are many child health nurses and midwives whose training is out of date. Even though most people with a breastfeeding issue don't need to see a doctor it is often the first place they go. I have heard many disturbing stories of how mothers have gone to their GPs for help to continue feeding but are instead told to put their baby on formula. Most mothers' just want help to feed and at this vulnerable time, if someone in authority tells them just to put their baby on formula, it does not do much for their confidence. It would be like when you are learning to drive and when you ask for someone to help they just pass you a bus ticket.

I was personally told by a GP to put my perfectly healthy and growing 10 month old baby onto formula. I had my annual health check-up which included a breast exam. When she felt my breasts they were soft so she equated this to me not having enough milk. Anyone who has breastfed beyond the first couple of months knows that a woman's lactating breasts become softer as time goes on and it is not an indication of insufficient milk.

On another visit to a different GP I was told that I would have to wean my 18 month old because I had to take medication. This medication involved taking one pill once. I rang the Mothersafe (The Royal hospital for Women, NSW) free hotline for pregnant and breastfeeding mother's and they told me that this medication was not harmful and that if I wanted to be extra cautious just don't feed him for 2 hours after taking the medication. So I went from never breastfeeding my child again to not feeding him for 2 hours. This is a mild example of the wrong advice mother's receive on a daily basis from health professionals who are not trained in breastfeeding.

To help mother's breastfeed I also believe that the government needs to support the work of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. This group provides vital mother to mother support. It is a volunteer organisation full of well educated women who have a vast knowledge of breastfeeding and parenting skills and who are passionate about supporting families. Why should a lot of their time be spent raising funds to provide their service? Their time could be better spent supporting mums. I know that they provided me with invaluable support and information. They are trained to remain up to date at all times and everything they suggest can be backed up by the latest research. So the government should use this resource and support it financially.

The government could best support it by providing funds to make their 24 hour breastfeeding hotline toll free. As a resident of a rural area, ABA can be the only source of support and information when a mother goes home. I lived in remote NSW when I had my first child; ABA was the only place I could get support from. The closest maternity hospital was over 100 kms away and we had no lactation consultant.

Another way to increase the importance of breastmilk in our society is to ban all forms of formula advertising. The WHO Code suggests that this is the way to give mother's confidence to breastfeed. Formula advertising undermines a mother's confidence and is in many cases is false and misleading. In recent years the health implications of artificial feeding have come to light and as a society we need to start addressing this. It is not right that formula companies can continue to make health claims about their products. Their advertising is very subversive. They try to make normal infant behaviour seem abnormal and that formula can 'fix' it. They also advertise through 'information' brochures and helplines.

I recently saw an advert in a baby magazine, that was given to me by the child health nurse at my 2 week post natal visit, dated September 2006 by Bayer that was entitled 'Putting feeding problems to bed'. It listed hungry, growing, reflux, constipation, waking and diarrhea as feeding problems. These are all problems that parents worry about but are not the fault of breastfeeding. It showed houses at night with their lights on, obviously representing lack of sleep. Babies wake, it does not mean there is something wrong, this is normal infant behaviour. They also list constipation as a problem formula can solve. Constipation is the main side effect of formula. Breastfeed babies are rarely constipated. They also listed diarrhea which plays on the fact that breastfeed babies have runny motions which parents can worry about because it's different to an adults. Most of these apparent 'feeding problems' can be solved with some reliable and accurate information which will help parents have a clearer understanding of what to expect from a baby.

They then listed a free call number to call them for advice. The ad stated that 'more than half of babies suffer feeding problems' and that 'signs of distress include constant crying, difficulty settling and sleeping only briefly before waking and crying again'. What new parent doesn't think their baby cries a lot or they worry they can't settle them. Do you really think they will suggest to keep breastfeeding? Do you think they have trained lactation consultants on the line helping them to overcome any feeding difficulties? They are only there to sell a product and they do this by playing on parents' insecurities at a very vulnerable time.

This also goes to the problem ABA has, you can freecall the formula company for feeding problem advice but not an association that has no ulterior motive other than support and provide accurate breastfeeding information. Calling ABA costs the parents money because they are often charged STD rates and for what is often a long phone call.

Another obstacle in increasing breastfeeding rates is that at present the MAIF agreement is voluntary and only applies to manufacturers not retailers. The MAIF agreement needs to be strengthened and made into legislation. We need to penalise formula manufacturers and retailers who do not comply with the legislation. It seems ridiculous to me that the manufacturers have some restrictions on advertising to parents but then the retailer can have stands up in the store to advertise or place ads in their special catalogues with no restrictions.

I have also noticed that formula manufacturers try to get around the MAIF agreement that restricts their advertising of formula for under 12 months. They advertise their toddler milks without any fear of repercussions. They place the toddler milks in the same type of tins as the other formula so it looks the same and then place a big 3 on the outside to represent that it is the 3rd formula in a series. The other tins have 1 (birth to 6 months) and 2 (follow on formula) on the outside. So they are really advertising all their formulas because they all look alike.

In conclusion it is important to remember that breastfeeding is biologically normal. It is the way babies were intended to be fed. Unfortunately nearly 90 years of formula has changed our society's perceptions of what is normal baby behaviour. We now know what the health, social and economic ramifications of artificial feeding are so let's do something about it. Start really supporting mothers. How a mother feeds her child can no longer be seen as a lifestyle choice. It is fact that most breastfeeding problems can be overcome with accurate information and reliable practical support and it is a fact that the vast majority of mothers if given a choice would breastfeed. So listen to all the breastfeeding support people that write to you, all they want to do is help mothers, they cannot make money out of breastfeeding. Ask yourself what do the formula companies stand to gain out of this.

I would anticipate that you will receive submissions from infant formula manufacturers (or at the very least, IFMA) and although I am not party to their submission, I can predict with some confidence that it will 1) State that they fully support breastfeeding as "best" for babies and that they do not believe that they do not target their marketing at breastfeeding women 2) That they believe that the MAIF agreement is working well 3) That they support mother's rights to make informed decisions about infant feeding however, 4) this does not include telling them of the risks of artificial feeding because this would be "negative" and "make women feel guilty". It is natural for women to feel guilty about their children whether it is appropriate or not. Breastfeeding is not 'best' it is normal. The MAIF agreement is working for THEM not for supporting breastfeeding, which is what it is intended for. And finally, at present women cannot make an informed choice because they are not being told the reality of artificial feeding.

I hope that this inquiry is the first step in this Government's support of the health of all mother's and children. Let's become a progressive nation that supports

breastfeeding and doesn't let money and multinationals control our nation's health. Let's put the money we save by supporting breastfeeding back into our nation rather than letting formula and pharmaceutical companies make profits out of our children's health.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours Sincerely

Prue Dawson.