

As a mother of a 13 month old baby I would like to comment based on my own experience. In particular points d and e in the terms of reference.

I was originally booked into a birth centre but due to complications I had to have an emergency Caesarean and ended up staying in the main hospital. During my time there I was unsuccessful in establishing breastfeeding. The midwives were mainly too busy to help despite my repeated requests for assistance and of those who did try to assist some were helpful while some were not.

When I was discharged I continued to try to breastfeed but I had problems with attachment and breast refusal. I sought help from the Lactation Consultant employed at the hospital and I am very disappointed to have to say she was not only unhelpful but downright discouraging. She refused to help with my attachment problems, instead she told me to introduce a formula supplement to help my baby's weight gain, incorrectly diagnosed low milk supply and even suggested, without examining me properly, that I would probably be unable to fully breastfeed as my breasts were "the wrong shape".

To say I was shattered would be an understatement. Fortunately I am stubborn and so I then sought help from an independent International Board Certified Lactation Consultant who was marvelous. She was prepared and knowledgeable, within 48 hours of her visit I had thrown the formula away and was back to full time breastfeeding. We haven't looked back since and I have no intention of stopping before my child turns two years old.

After that long preamble my point is that I don't believe there is enough being done to encourage, teach, and support breastfeeding. The antenatal class which touched on breastfeeding told us how good and natural it was but didn't mention all the problems we were likely to encounter and, more importantly, that they were surmountable with a little help and perseverance. There is very little help provided after discharge from hospital, and even when you go looking for it you might encounter what I did: a supposed professional who had no qualifications, little knowledge and was completely unhelpful and discouraging. Health professionals of all descriptions need more education in regards to breastfeeding and, in my opinion, only qualified people (for example International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) should be employed as Lactation Consultants in hospitals.

Finally, I believe that society in general needs to be made aware that breastmilk is not just the "best" but the only food for baby. Formula is pervasive, TV shows and movies generally only depict formula feeding and bottles are seen as a universal symbol for babies. Breastfeeding needs to come out of the closet and take its place as the normal way to feed a baby.