


Submission no. 405AUTHORISED: 20/6/07 **Subject:** Inquiry into Breastfeeding

Further to your requests from mother's who have given up breastfeeding, and what was hard about it, I wish to submit my experiences to the committee.

I think there were a number of factors that cumulated in me stopping breastfeeding my baby at just 8 weeks old.

I was separated from my baby immediately after her birth, while I went into recovery after a forceps delivery. I was not encouraged, or directed to feed my baby, for up to three hours after the birth (which I was surprised at since I had given birth at a "breastfeeding friendly hospital", in which I expected to have baby to breast within hour of birth). My baby was subsequently taken to the special care nursery with low blood sugar levels (not surprising given lack of sustenance). There were subsequent complications of this which saw my baby spend 5 days in the nursery, 3 of these with no breastfeeding, but being fed with a tube. As well as this, I was induced a little over 2 weeks early, and subsequently missed the breastfeeding education class that I was enrolled in at the hospital.

We left hospital 8 days after the birth, and while it was still a little tricky trying to breastfeed a smaller than average baby, the weight was increasing steadily, and I felt proud of my efforts.

Being a small baby, I was instructed to have my baby weighed each week. Things were going well for a couple of weeks, putting on over 200g for the next couple of weeks. Then at 4 weeks, there was only a 20g gain. 50g the next week, and 20g the week after that. My baby was becoming more and more unsettled, and I was becoming more and more stressed. I also became obsessed with my baby's weight, because I was being told to come back to have my baby weighed every week, and despite the fact that the MACH nurses were obviously not happy with the gains, the only advice I was getting was to come back next week. I even made the suggestion that perhaps I should try feeding every 2 hours through the day, but the nurse said there was no need, and just to come back next week.

I would go into the clinic and the nurses would ask how everything was going. "Good" I would reply. How was I supposed to know that it wasn't good? Here I was, a first time mum, first time breastfeeding. I didn't know what it was supposed to be like, so I assumed it was all normal. Don't all babies cry? Then mine was normal. Aren't all new mother's tired? Then I was normal.

After the third week of less than 100g weight gains, the nurse decided to book us into the day stay unit where we could be observed feeding and try to find any problems. That was great, but it would be another five days before our appointment. With the constant worry about weight gain, and if I was starving my baby, even 24 hours was a long time, but 5 days!

A couple of days later I received a phone call to say that the day stay sessions for the week we were booked in had been cancelled. At breaking point, and on the verge of tears I asked the person on the phone what I was supposed to do. To their credit, they arranged for a nurse to come and see me the next day.

The nurse came and spoke to us for about half an hour, all she could really do as my baby wasn't due for a feed in the time she was there.

Within the next 5 days I had to resort to feeding my baby formula. I was totally devastated and cried and cried while giving that first bottle.

I expressed when I could, and continued to combine expressed breast milk and formula until my baby was 6 months old, at which point solids were started and the milk intake was completely formula.

I felt extreme guilt that our breastfeeding relationship had failed, and that I had to resort to second best for my baby.

Obviously it is hard to say exactly what would have helped us to be able to continue breastfeeding. Without a doubt I needed some one-on-one consultation that could observe the feeding behaviour over a few feeds (the

purpose of the day stay clinic). I feel all new mothers would benefit from having this available to them within the first few weeks of having their baby. Having this take place in the home would be ideal, but even at the unit would be adequate. If there are problems identified, or if the mother is particularly stressed about the situation, it would be appropriate to have follow up consultations once or twice a week for one to two weeks following the initial observation period.

There are plenty of help lines to call, and that is wonderful, but I think that ultimately there needs to be a face to face consultation with a professional who can see what is going on and offer practical solutions. Maybe these help lines need to be able to organise visits with lactation consultants or nurses, when a mother is calling for help?

I admit that while I was pregnant, I took the fact that I would breastfeed my baby for granted. I did think that it would all just work out. I did some reading, but didn't realize how difficult it would be just to get my baby attached. When the time comes for us to have another baby, I will do a lot more research, and educate myself a lot more. I will join the ABA, and attend their meetings, as I really believe that having a network and being around other breastfeeding women would have to be a blessing. No one around me even had babies, so none of them knew of any difficulties with breastfeeding.

My baby is now a beautiful 14 month old who is thriving in every way. I don't know if there would be any difference if I had continued breastfeeding exclusively but it is certainly what I would have preferred.

Regards

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