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Inquiry into health benefits of breastfeeding.

Submitted by:

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SUMMARY

Breastfeeding gives babies the best start in life, with benefits flowing to mothers, the environment, health system, the economy and virtually every aspect of society.

The decrease in breastfeeding since the 1950's coincided with the increased availability of packaged, processed and "convenient" artificial baby milks known as infant "formula".

It is interesting that these babies are now part of the (adult) "epidemic" of obesity and the increasing incidence of late onset diabetes.

There is an increasing body of evidence which shows that breastfeeding can result in a decreased incidence of these and many other health problems.

The World Health Organisation, the United Nations Children's Fund and health agencies worldwide recommend that mothers breastfeed their babies exclusively for the first 6 months, and continue breastfeeding together with giving other foods and drinks, up to two years or more, as long as mother and baby want to.

I believe that governments at all levels could do a great deal towards attaining some of the above recommendations.

This submission contains a very minute part of the vast amounts of research which shows the health benefits of breastfeeding, so I have focussed on the "hot topics" of today such as:

- in children, reduced incidence of: obesity, diabetes, asthma, eczema, and mental health problems
- and for the mother reduced incidence of: pre menopausal breast and ovarian cancer, obesity and osteoporosis.

This submission also focuses on initiatives to encourage breastfeeding and includes:

- implementing "Baby friendly" to all or as many maternity and paediatric facilities in Australia as possible
- a greater role for lactation consultants and volunteer organizations such as Australian Breastfeeding Association- particularly in the early weeks after discharge from hospital
- greater support from both government and private health insurance agencies (to provide funding for additional lactation support to mothers in hospital and the early months), and rebates for private lactation consultant visits
- government funding for a National Breastfeeding Coordinator
- maternity/parental leave to be more breastfeeding/family friendly (at least 6-12 months or more), paid leave, more opportunities for part-time work, and increased workplace support for breastfeeding mothers.

- a. The extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding
- b. The potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding

Babies who have not received the protective and nutritive qualities of breastmilk have the following:

- less than optimal growth and development ,with significantly lower neurological, cognitive and psychomotor development
- not breastfeeding or early weaning is associated with increased incidence of infections, such as gastrointestinal, urinary tract, and lower respiratory tract, as well as otitis media, septicaemia and meningitis
- increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome SIDS, allergic conditions, type 1 diabetes mellitus, obesity and other chronic diseases later in life (Brodrribb 2004),
- necrotizing enterocolitis NEC, infants of 30-36 weeks gestation fed formula are 20 times more likely to get NEC than breastfed infants
- babies breastfed for longer than 6 months are less likely to develop mental health problems in childhood (Oddy 2006)
- breastfeeding for longer than 6 months has a modest protective effect against obesity in adolescence (Shields et al Royal Australasian College of Physicians- Paediatrics and Child Health Division 2006)
- NB There is a great opportunity to monitor the impact of not breastfeeding. The Kids Eat, Kids Play survey as reported in The Age Sat 24 Feb. 2007, would be an excellent opportunity to monitor children's growth from birth to age two
- It would be an ideal time to consider adopting the new WHO Growth Standards, Australia-wide. (see enclosed)

Mothers who have not breastfed have an increased risk of pre-menopausal breast cancer and ovarian cancer, and an increased incidence of osteoporotic hip and spine fractures (ADA, 2006; Brodrribb,2004)

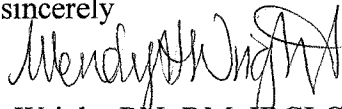
Adolescent women who breastfeed their babies have a 5-10% higher bone mineral density than women who have not breastfed (Chantry et al 2004)

See enclosed journal article and newspaper cuttings

a. Initiatives to encourage breastfeeding

- Encourage as many maternity hospitals and Paediatric facilities to introduce the "Baby Friendly" initiative. Switzerland has improved breastfeeding rates this way
- Improved workplace support, parental leave. Sweden and Norway have the highest breastfeeding rates in the OECD as well as the highest women's labour market participation rates
- Breastfeeding initiation rates are 90% in Australia; but decrease rapidly, being 48% at 1 month. Mothers need much greater support in the early weeks and months to maintain the high initiation rate, such as lactation consultant visits in hospital and close follow-up for 2-3 weeks after. There is a high proportion of LC's already in Australian hospitals and the community setting (working privately or as Maternal and Child Health Nurses); so with adequate funding could do more hospital and follow up visits. Health Insurance agencies will rarely provide a rebate for women (for a private lactation consultant visit) who are privately insured, and if they do often the top level of cover is required.
- In 2002 Robert Knowles was commissioned to provide a report on the functioning of APMAIF, and he recommended that a National Infant Nutrition Coordinator (this could be a National Breastfeeding Coordinator) be appointed- I believe this would be an important step in the right direction.
- Another way to encourage breastfeeding would be to ban the advertising of all toddler formula. It's an insidious way of getting around not being able to advertise infant formula (WHO Code). Advertising works, and two of our sports stars, Liz Ellis and Hayley Lewis have both been seen in these ads.
- To really bring home the fact that advertising works see articles enclosed: "Baby formula battle goes to Manila court". The next day in the same newspaper was an ad. for toddler formula- "How to support your toddler's immunity".

Yours sincerely



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