



Submission no. 152

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Committee Secretariat
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
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Re: Inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding

Dear Sir/Madame,

I represent the Western Australian branch of the College of Lactation Consultants and wish to submit this letter in reply to your offer of a public submission into the inquiry addressing the issue of supporting and sustaining breastfeeding in the community.

We are an organisation of International Board Qualified Lactation Consultants. The International Board of Lactation Consultants Examiners was founded in 1985 in the U.S.A... It has administered exams in several languages and numerous sites around the world. The primary purpose is to benefit the public by setting standards for the lactation consultant profession. The designation International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) identifies appropriately qualified member of the health care team who are bound by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners' code of ethics. Recertification is required every five years to further protect the public by ensuring the continuing competence of certificates.

Around the world our (IBCLC's) mission statement remains the same: to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. The government has acknowledged the importance of breastfeeding by placing it as the first priority in the National Dietary Guidelines for children. The government is also aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, short and long term, for the infant, mother, family, community and hence to the whole nation. A preliminary economic analysis carried out by Denise Drane (Breastfeeding Review Vol. 5 No. 1 May 1997) 10 years ago suggested savings to government health dollars of \$11.75 million if breastfeeding rates increased from 60% to 80% at three months.

The World Health Organisation recommendations are: that all infants should be fully breastfed for the first six months of life and continue to breastfeed for two years and beyond. As a nation we fall short of this aim. It is a well known fact that there is a high rate of initiation in breastfeeding but that rates fall dramatically by six weeks and then again by three months. Lactation Consultants believe that our service is an integral part of the health care team.

Our College of Lactation Consultants has been trying to gain recognition for several years to be considered for rebate from the healthcare system. We are aware that although there is a high percentage of women breastfeeding at discharge from hospital there is a considerable drop off in numbers in the first few weeks. It is our aim to educate, advise and support these women through group education sessions, consultation and/or follow-up. Some initiatives already provided by the College of Lactation Consultants to encourage duration of breastfeeding are the provision of monthly education sessions to health professionals, regular workshops and seminars, marketing and advertising our services to the public. The role of the Lactation Consultant involves many facets including educating the public e.g.

providing workshops and/or seminars to health professionals, speaking to schools and community groups, classes for antenatal and postnatal groups, as well as grandparent groups.

Breastfeeding is a learned skill. It takes time to master this skill and many mothers have not developed these skills before discharge from hospital. International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are health care providers who, by meeting eligibility requirements and by passing an independent examination, are certified to possess the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to provide quality breastfeeding assistance to babies and mothers. There are now many designated positions for IBCLCs. We work in hospitals, maternal and child health, the community and private practice. As more health care facilities make a commitment to improving their breastfeeding practices and success rates, education of staff has been identified as a crucial step in the procedure.

We therefore would like to propose that to encourage breastfeeding duration Lactation Consultants are acknowledged as professionals and provided access to Medicare Provider Numbers in order for women to have more access to those LCs available and for more Lactation consultants to be able to work in the community where the need exists. Currently there is no rebate.

Yours sincerely,

Joy Cooke

President

College of Lactation Consultants Western Australia Incorporated