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From: Bronwyn Warner
Sent: Tuesday, 14 February 2007 10:00 AM
To: Bronwyn Warner
Subject: Submission for the Inquiry into Breastfeeding in Australia

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My name is Bronwyn Warner and I am the mother of 4 children. My experience with breastfeeding is quite extensive, as I have been feeding for the past 8 years. I have fed a singleton, tandem fed, triple tandem fed and now I am tandem feeding again, as my eldest 2 children are weaned. This was their choice and desire, at no stage were they made to breastfeed (just the opposite in fact).

Despite our somewhat uncommon situation, our story starts very typically. As a pregnant woman, I assumed breastfeeding would be easy and my baby would know exactly what to do. Never was how I would feed my baby addressed the whole time I was pregnant. Unfortunately, this all too commonly believed situation wasn't true for us.

My newborn was taken from me to be weighed and cleaned and returned to me wrapped up. I know now this is one of the worst things midwives can do to baby mother dyads. My daughter was able to attach and feed, and over that night had several feeds. The next day it all went horribly wrong, and very quickly I had terribly traumatised nipples. My daughter was given bottles of formula, but at no time did anyone tell me what this could do for our breastfeeding relationship (or her health system).

As time passed, I learned more about breastfeeding. I had no issues feeding my next two babies. I fed through pregnancy and my older child/ren were able to feed as soon as they wanted after the baby was born.

With my last baby, once again problems occurred as she was in shock when she shot out of me (extremely fast labour) and had to be stimulated in order to breath. Her throat and mouth was sore, which led to not attaching properly, which led to nipple trauma. Fortunately this time, I had the assistance of an International Board Certified Lactation

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Consultant – the gold standard for a lactation consultant. (IBCLCs are required to re-sit the exams and attend lactation information sessions over the period of their certification. It is time involved and only people who are genuinely interested in lactation tend to achieve this qualification).

Our breastfeeding relationship has been, for me, quite painful and challenging. However, due to my knowledge of WHY breastfeeding is so important (especially as my children are all cows' milk protein intolerant so a cows' milk formula would be dangerous for them to consume), I have persevered and, at 8 months of age, it appears we've passed our hurdles (the latest being biting through cutting teeth).

As well as being CMPI, my children are also allergic to wheat. Because using formula can introduce auto immune disorders, asthma and other conditions, I fully believe had they not been breastfed, they would be quite sick with life long illnesses (such as juvenile diabetes).

My experience has shown how much our governments could save in health dollars, and my experience is typical of breastfed children. My eldest (8 years old) has been ill, requiring doctors' visits, only 4 times. Number 2 (6) has been once for tonsillitis when he was 4 and a half (we won't mention the self induced conditions that needed medical attention, but then again, he's a boy). Number 3 (3 years old) has never been to the doctor and has never been ill. Same with the baby. Employing IBCLCs to help mothers with breastfeeding issues (or supporting Australian Breastfeeding Association) would be a very good step in keeping breastfed babies exclusively breastfed for the six months WHO recommends (and as long thereafter as mum and bub wish).

I have been asked many times when I'm going to wean my baby. The community views breastfeeding an older baby, let alone a toddler!, as sick and 'child abuse'. I know of many women who are scared to breastfeed in public. I know of women who have been abused for doing so. Women are told there's no nutrition in breastmilk once a baby is 6 weeks, 6 months, 12 months (pick an age), so more pressure to wean. It has been said to me that I breastfeed for my own pleasure (sexual pleasure implied).

Weight gains are another area where women are pressured to comp feed with formula or wean the baby. Then we wonder why on earth we have such an obesity problem. I was told to start my son on rice cereal because he was small (we know now that this is due to his wheat allergy. After taking wheat out of his diet, he is catching up quite quickly). I was told my 2nd daughter would have intellectual problems because she wasn't on iron fortified cereal. For a disabled (which of course she isn't) 3 year old, she is awfully smart.

One doctor was amazed I was feeding the three of them while pregnant with my 4th. His comment 'won't it hurt the foetus?' The lack of knowledge among our health professionals is mind blowing and somewhat dangerous. Breastfeeding is such a vital and necessary part of every human's life, yet those people mothers trust to help them are not given the necessary training, or information, regarding what is normal in a breastfed baby.

I am a member of Australian Breastfeeding Association and find it quite amazing the difference in how long our babies are breastfed compared to babies of mothers who don't belong to the association. At new mums groups, and playgroup etc, it is almost a competition to see whose baby gets weaned first, or given solids – the government has to get the message out there – offering formula when it isn't medically indicated, or offering solids too early can be detrimental to the health of the baby.

Recently I became aware that some of the States hold health professional information sessions that are sponsored by the manufacturers of formula. And the government employees who organise these sessions don't believe this is a conflict of interest and that the health professionals won't be influenced by the information given to them by the sponsors. This truly amazes me. At my local child health centre and chemists, there are brochures produced by these same sponsors. The brochures are designed to

encourage mothers to believe breastfeeding is so hard and requires so much extra effort on her part, when of course breastfeeding is far easier. These brochures take an ounce of truth and twist it, and add to it until you have to know a lot about breastfeeding to find that truth. My child health centre also has boxes and boxes of formula samples. Some of the nurses aren't particularly breastfeeding aware and if a mother encounters a hiccup, or her baby is acting normally for a breastfed baby – feeding 2 hourly for example, formula samples are offered immediately. And another breastfeeding relationship is over, and another baby's health is at risk. The government needs to step in and prevent manufacturers of infant formula – and this means ALL manufacturers, not just the signatories to the agreement – from educating the public or professionals on breastfeeding, or feeding of infants and toddlers.

I truly hope this enquiry results in a change of language for the government and health professionals. Babies don't need us to ignore these issues, and mothers feel guilty regardless of what they do. The government doesn't stop advertising, and indeed making it law, that babies need to be in an appropriate car seat, and other safety measures – why on earth should how you feed your baby be any different to how you travel with your baby in the car?

However, once the language changes from 'benefits of breastfeeding', 'breast is best', to the risks of premature weaning, once the health professionals show more than token support for breastfeeding, once the government gets tough on formula manufacturers and stops them from educating the public and health professionals, our country's health will improve, millions of health dollars will be saved and mothers can start feeling better. Because they need the support and the information – the true information not information given by a profit driven organization such as formula manufacturers.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Bronwyn Warner