

Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation
(Subsidiary of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society)
Position Statement on Promotion of Breastfeeding
20th December 2012, Hong Kong

A “Summit on Breastfeeding” was organized by the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation at the Hospital Authority Headquarter Office on 18th December 2012. The programme consisted of 1) Early Nutrition, Breastfeeding and Child Development by Prof. DING Zongyi (President of the Chinese Committee on Child Health of the China Medical Doctor Association, China); 2) Ethics for Early Nutrition by Dr. CHAN Chok Wan (Chairman of the Ethics Committee of the International Pediatric Association); and 3) Promotion of Breastfeeding in the Community by Ms. Susanna Lee (President of the Asia-Pacific Paediatric Nurses Association). There were over 100 participants including paediatricians working at public and private sectors, paediatric nurses, lactation consultants, child health officials from Department of Health and healthcare workers from various child health sectors including members from the Infant Nutrition Industry. The following consensus was recorded from the Summit:

■ **The Human Milk Composition: Nutrients and Bioactive Factors were positively affirmed:**

- i. Human milk composition from a healthy and well prepared lactating mother provides the standard for human infant nutrition, including the bioactive components that safeguard growth and development of a healthy infant.
- ii. The composition of human milk is variable within feeds, diurnally, over lactation, and between mothers and populations. This variability has benefits for infant health and survival, but for high-risk infants with special medical conditions requiring close nutritional oversight, strategies for managing the variability of human milk feeds are needed.
- iii. Good nutrition for pregnant women / lactating mothers is important to ensure the quality of breast milk in providing the best nutrients to newborns and infants. Appropriate nutritional preparation should be encouraged in the pre-pregnancy stage.
- iv. The composition and quality of human milk can be altered with treatment of expressed milk, including its storage and pasteurization. Therefore, attention to management of expressed milk is important.

■ **Breastfeeding and Health: Outcomes for the Mother and Infant**

- i. Breastfeeding protects child health and development by reducing risk of infection and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) during infancy and by reducing risk of cancers, improving cognitive outcomes, and promoting appropriate metabolic development through childhood to adulthood.
- ii. Breastfeeding protects the health of women by promoting postpartum weight normalization and lactation amenorrhea, reducing long-term risk of reproductive cancers, and promoting the return of metabolic profiles to that of the pre-pregnant state, which may result in decreased risk of later Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

■ **Breastfeeding Practice in Hong Kong: Opportunities and Challenges**

- i. Most lactating women in Hong Kong do not meet breastfeeding recommendations due to a variety of factors such as breastfeeding initiation, duration and exclusivity, including socio-demographic and biologic variables, attitudinal characteristics, and the healthcare environment. Promotion of breastfeeding should focus on reducing the unfavourable socio-environmental factors rather than individual blames.
- ii. There are mothers who are unable to provide breastfeeding to their babies due to medical or personal reasons. Support rather than blames should be provided to this group of mothers. Evidence-based information on breast milk substitutes should be allowed to disseminate to professionals and parents in order to facilitate parents to make informed decision on the nutritional choices for their babies.
- iii. Support should be given to both breastfeeding mothers and non-breastfeeding mothers under all circumstances including those in hospitals, after discharge and in the community to ensure the best nutrition and growth of the babies.
- iv. Advertisements and non-factual claims of breast-milk substitutes should be regulated and censored.
- v. Proper nutritional assessment of babies and consultation on infant feeding should be the role and responsibility of health care professionals.

Conclusion

1. Breast milk from healthy and well prepared lactating mothers is the best for healthy newborns and infants. Breastfeeding is the normal and natural way of infant nutrition and there is no substitute better than that and no other “feeding choice” better for infants as evidenced by the solid evidence on the medical literature, current and in the past.
2. Hence there is great need to *normalize* breastfeeding as the sole choice for feeding healthy newborn babies. There are very few genuine indications for mothers who should not or cannot breast-feed their babies. We look forward to a local Breastfeeding Code whereby women feel enabled and supported to initiate and continue breastfeeding for as long as they wish. The society needs to ensure all newborn babies be provided with best food they rightly deserve.
3. Parents are supported to make informed choices about feeding their babies and everyone is aware of the significant benefits associated with breastfeeding. Parents who have chosen other nutrition means rather breastfeeding for their babies should also be supported.
4. Ensure that the marketing of nutritional products during pregnancy and infancy as well as follow on formulae is conducted in a way that minimizes its negative impacts on exclusive breastfeeding and that claims about formula are truthful and not misleading.
5. Government should develop an appropriate monitoring and sanction mechanism to ensure compliance of the Breastfeeding Code that has taken into account of the Hong Kong situations.
6. Government should establish a broad, high-level “Above-Code Central Committee on Breastfeeding” composed of representatives from relevant government departments, NGOs and health professional associations, with adequate resources and appropriate authority to develop multi-pronged policy and regulatory strategy to promote, coordinate, support and monitor exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months for all newborn babies in Hong Kong. Failure to breastfeed exclusively for 6 months is a system issue rather than an individual failure of the mother.

Immediate Measures to be taken in the Community

1. Implement the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding of WHO
2. Implement best practice into the healthcare services across all sectors in Hong Kong
3. Improve training for health professionals on maternal and infant nutrition
4. Work with employers to create a supportive environment for breastfeeding mothers
5. Develop policy and practice to support breastfeeding in public places
6. Include breastfeeding education in the school curriculum starting from junior grades
7. Create a baby-friendly culture and environment in the community to promote breastfeeding and to support mothers to practice breastfeeding
8. Develop a “Breastfeeding logo” to promote breastfeeding and act as an icon in the Breastfeeding Campaign in the community

Endorsed by

The Board and Executive Committee of Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation and

The Council of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society

on 27th Dec 2012