Connecting Parents with Community Resources:
A Guide for Healthcare Professionals

STEP TEN:
FOSTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT GROUPS AND REFER MOTHERS TO THEM ON DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL OR BIRTH CENTER.

Best Practices Prior to Discharge

1. Assess any current or anticipated breastfeeding problems based on maternal and/or infant risk factors (these are reviewed in the ABM Protocol #2). Document and attend to all breastfeeding issues, whether observed by staff or raised by the parents. Create an action plan that includes a specific plan for follow-up after discharge.

2. Arrange for a postpartum follow-up visit, within 3-5 days of age or 48-72 hours after discharge, by a physician or midwife. Consider any home visiting opportunities for which she may be qualified. The mother’s 4 to 6-week follow-up visit to the obstetrician or family physician should also be scheduled.

3. If a family is eligible for WIC, call the local agency to set up a new referral. Exclusive breastfeeding is rewarded in the WIC program in many ways.

4. Provide all breastfeeding families with contact information of professional services, including International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs,) who provide breastfeeding assessments, support, and counseling. Remind patients that common breastfeeding difficulties can be addressed, that they should not suffer alone, and encourage them to reach out for assistance early when it is needed.

5. Refer patients to any local “warm lines” or national hotlines that offer postpartum support, both for breastfeeding questions and also for domestic violence or mental health concerns. La Leche League, for example, maintains a toll-free hotline with 24-hour support in English or Spanish.

6. Provide parents with lists and contact information for local support groups and services for breastfeeding families. Include peer support groups, clinic or hospital-based support groups, and WIC peer counseling and support group information. Encourage patients to contact and consider attending at least one of their local groups.

7. Inquire if patients plan to return to work or school. Proper planning will help ensure that all available support is utilized. Refer appropriately to resources specifically tailored to help new parents plan for their return to work, including any local and/or state laws in place in support of breastfeeding parents. Refer patients to the Office of Women’s Health’s webpage on breastfeeding for helpful tips on breastfeeding and going back to work.


The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary food for up to 2 years and beyond. Studies show that many parents wean earlier than they desire, often due to breastfeeding difficulties, many of which may have been prevented with timely support. If new mothers are to achieve their feeding goals, it is vital that they have adequate follow-up care and know where to find additional support in the community from both professionals and other parents.

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9. Encourage families to seek information from trusted sources such as health agencies. Many companies selling products to new families may offer “health advice” directed at new mothers’ concerns. Commercial health advice is at risk for biased information and/or claims that are not backed by high-quality evidence.

TIP: A new parent’s community of support begins with immediate family and friends. Encourage mothers and partners to plan for a period of “nesting in” after returning home from the hospital. This means that visitors and phone calls are limited and responsibilities outside the family are put on hold. Encourage the creation of a network of support the family can call on during this special time by suggesting the following to new families:

- Create a list of chores such as laundry, cleaning, grocery shopping and meal preparation. When close friends and family are in touch with excitement and congratulations, request that they lend a helping hand with one of the chores on the list.

- Ask a close friend to organize frequent delivery of meals for your family. Neighbors, coworkers and other acquaintances will be happy to contribute this kind of support.

- Consider setting up frequent play dates or child care for any older children to ease the transition of the new baby at home.

- Encourage the mother to discuss her feelings trusted loved ones. Transitions can be difficult; be sure they are getting the support you need. If they are experiencing depressive symptoms, please notify the healthcare provider about their feelings.

REFERENCES:


US Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General’s CAROLINA GLOBAL 10 call to action to support breastfeeding. 2011; 18-23