



Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in Ireland Annual Report for 2012

Nineteen of the 20 maternity units currently participated in the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in 2012. During 2012, two hospitals, the Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar and the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise were designated as meeting the criteria as a Baby Friendly Hospital and thus awarded. This brought the number of currently designated hospitals to eight. Two hospitals underwent scheduled five-yearly full re-assessments and were re-designated with a further two hospitals commencing their re-designation process. Support and discussion was carried out with other hospitals moving towards reaching the standards needed for designation. The BFHI assessment team participated in continuing education and was active in their assessment work. Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace awards were presented to four hospitals despite this aspect of the initiative being inactive for most of the year due to funding restrictions.

Based on the data returned by the hospitals to the BFHI national coordinator for 2011, 41.76% of births occurred in a Baby Friendly designated hospital. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative began in Ireland in 1998 when the prevalence of any breastfeeding on discharge was 31%; in 2011 it was 53%. Evidence from the BFHI data and from data of the Growing Up in Ireland study indicates that Baby Friendly Hospitals made a noticeable difference to the increase in breastfeeding rates.

Participating hospitals each carry out a planned action during the year to improve and sustain practices. In 2012 actions planned included increasing the use of mother's milk in the neonatal unit, staff training, improving practices of early contact between mother and baby after c-section, discussions during antenatal visits, effective use of antenatal information checklist, improvement in data collection for feeding rates and practices, clarifying the informed discussion with women considering using infant formula.

The BFHI Link newsletter was published three times during the year including reports of achievements, breastfeeding statistics, and items to assist in implementing the practices including staff materials and parent handouts. The BFHI Link is available on the website. The BFHI in Ireland activity was highlighted in conference and academic presentations in Ireland and internationally, in media items and with a display at events.

The BFHI is represented on the National Breastfeeding Strategy Implementation Committee and sub-committees and works closely with the National Breastfeeding Coordinator. Specific activities during the year focused on provision of joint materials, examination of health worker training needs, alignment of policy audit processes and Code of Marketing related activity.

The BFHI is funded through a grant from the HSE Health Promotion. The BFHI in Ireland restructured its National Committee this year towards developing a longer term governance structure and a committee with wider representation. The Committee and the Coordinator thank all those involved in assisting the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative to be active and effective in 2012: the staff members in the participating hospitals, the members of the assessment teams and the committee and their managers who facilitated them to have the time for these duties, UNICEF Ireland and the Rotunda Hospital for providing committee meeting facilities, the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland for their facilitation of funding, breastfeeding organisations that encouraged their members to expect Baby Friendly practices, and Siobhan Hourigan, National Breastfeeding Coordinator.
