

The hospitalised lactating mother

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Continued breastfeeding through maternal illness or hospitalization is important for the wellbeing of both the mother and the baby. A lactating mother who is acutely or chronically ill will require help and support to assess both the risks and benefits of either initiating breastfeeding or in the continuation of established breastfeeding during her illness. Furthermore, as a hospital in-patient, the mother will have additional risk factors that may impact on her ability to breastfeed her baby effectively.

All healthcare professionals are responsible for supporting women to breastfeed. Staff caring for a breastfeeding mother in a general hospital setting do not necessarily have the knowledge and skills to provide this support and assistance. Additionally, they may not know where to access relevant information – hence the need for clear, concise guidelines which also provide information about other resources available.

The AMNCH Hospital multidisciplinary breastfeeding support committee, which also has members that represent the voluntary support groups La Leche League and Cuidiu, developed guidelines to assist general nursing staff with best practice and identification of any risks. This process should include an assessment of maternal medications in addition to the disease process and treatment for each individual mother.

These guidelines contain information on:

- The importance of breastfeeding for both the mother and the baby.
- The nurse's role in promoting and supporting breastfeeding
- Maternal risk factors which include but are not limited to:
 - Separation from baby which will result in disruption of normal feeding pattern
 - Unrelieved fullness or engorgement (leading to high risk of complications such as blocked ducts or mastitis or breast pain)
 - Maternal medication use
 - Thrush as a side effect of antibiotic therapy
 - Reduced maternal oral intake due to illness/fasting
- The need for temporary or permanent weaning to allow treatment, investigations or surgery

The nurse caring for the lactating mother should identify possible risk factors and plan appropriate and timely interventions to reduce their impact on breastfeeding. This will include providing additional support for breastfeeding due to illness and hospitalization. All interventions and treatments that may affect the breastfeeding relationship should be discussed, and 'breastfeeding friendly' alternatives explored to reduce the likelihood of early weaning. If temporary weaning is unavoidable, this can be planned and managed to reduce the complications of engorgement for the mother.

These guidelines aim to increase awareness among all staff that AMNCH should be a Baby Friendly Hospital recognising the importance of breastfeeding and providing support for mothers and staff.