

## ***Breastfeeding is good for hospitals too***

### ***Some Questions and Answers for Hospital Administrators***

#### ***Does breastfeeding really make a difference to health?***

Yes. Compared to the baby who is fully breastfed for more than 13 weeks, the baby who does not receive breast milk is:

- 5 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with diarrhoea and more likely to be ill for longer,
- 2 times more likely to be admitted with respiratory disease and more likely to have severe wheezy illness,
- 2 times more likely to suffer from otitis media,
- 2 times more likely to develop eczema or a wheeze if from a family with a history of atopic disease,
- 5 times more likely to develop a urinary tract infection,
- premature infants of 30-36 weeks gestation fed formula are 10 times more likely to get necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) than breastfed infants – a costly condition to treat and carries a 25% mortality rate.

#### ***What does that mean in money terms?***

A lot of money. For example, a Scottish study looked at the economic consequences of this higher risk of gastrointestinal illness (GI). Applying these calculations to the Irish birth rate results in a cost of €6.1 million per year for hospitalisations due to GI illness for infants who are not breastfed. If the national breastfeeding rate at 13 weeks increased by 5%, there could be a saving of €300,000 per annum. If the breastfeeding rate at 13 weeks increased to 30% in line with the target of the 1994 Irish National Breastfeeding Policy, there could be a saving of € 1.2 million per annum (at 1993 Scottish costs).

#### ***How much does it cost to provide infant formula for newborn infants during their hospital stay?***

Try this exercise. Check the cost of bottles of ready-to-feed formula and teats to your hospital and the percentage of babies who are not breastfeeding.

1000 births with a breastfeeding rate of 40% (i.e. 60% formula feeding rate) = 600 formula fed infants x 6 feeds per day x 3 days stay = 10,800 feeds. One bottle of Ready to Feed plus teat plus vat on teat = 0.55 cent (approx price). So, 10,800 x 0.55 = € 5940. In addition there is the waste management cost of disposing of over 10,800 glass bottles and a similar number of teats - and this is per 1000 births. All Irish hospitals have more births than this number and some have breastfeeding rates below 40%, so the costs can be even higher.

#### ***Why should a hospital assist staff mothers to breastfeed?***

A baby who is not breastfed is 6 times more likely to experience illness resulting in three times as many maternal absences from work. In addition, compared to women who breastfeed, not breastfeeding may increase the risk of breast cancer, hip fractures in older age and retention of fat deposited during pregnancy which may result in later obesity. A healthy staff is an investment. The BFHI/HPH Breastfeeding Supportive Workplace Project helps employers to support breastfeeding among their staff, which can reduce staff turnover, create a positive corporate image and assist in recruiting staff. Ask for more details.

#### ***Does participating in the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) incur costs?***

The main costs involved are for policy development and initial updating of staff. A well-trained staff practising evidence based policies shows service users that the hospital cares about providing the best care. Much of the BFHI can be incorporated into quality improvement and accreditation programmes. Some of the Ten Steps of the BFHI, such as rooming-in and supplementation only for clinical need, can directly decrease costs. Lower rates of illness in breastfed babies can result in lower costs in paediatric and pharmacy services. BFHI awards can give a competitive advantage for attracting new patients.

For references for the health importance of breastfeeding, see the Interim Report of the National Committee for Breastfeeding at [www.healthpromotion.ie/breastfeeding](http://www.healthpromotion.ie/breastfeeding) or contact BFHI in Ireland at [bfhi@iol.ie](mailto:bfhi@iol.ie)

