

Jefferson Designated Baby-friendly Hospital

Jefferson University Hospital delivers roughly 2,000 babies a year and has recently been recognized locally, nationally and internationally for being a “Baby-Friendly Hospital.” By responding to both the needs of newborns and their parents, Jefferson is making the health and wellness of future generations a key priority.

Starting in 2009, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began monitoring the way in which hospitals promote breastfeeding, Jefferson’s Department of Nursing took a fresh look at the way the hospital trained staff to work with parents around the dietary needs of newborns. This work inspired the department to inquire about becoming a certified Baby-friendly Hospital by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) program, which is administered in the United States by Baby Friendly USA. The evidenced-based program’s goal is to achieve optimal infant feeding outcomes and mother-baby bonding. A committee was then formed comprised of pediatricians, obstetricians, nurses, case managers, lactation consultants, and nutritionists. The group was co-chaired by Kathy Sibre, Nurse Manager of Maternity; Terry O’Brien, Manager, Parent Education; Joanne Walko, Maternity Nurse and Lactation Consultant; and Edward Buchanan, Family Medicine Doctor.

The committee’s first step was to learn about the designation’s required Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, which include having a clear breastfeeding policy; ensuring that staff are properly trained in breastfeeding; educating parents about all of their child’s nutritional options; facilitating “rooming in” where by mothers and infants remain together 24 hours a day; offering breastfeeding support groups; and deemphasizing obstacles to breastfeeding, such as the use of a pacifier.

From 2014-16, Terry O’Brien helped to design new mandatory trainings for all nurses and doctors about the steps. She is a registered nurse who has spent her entire career at Jefferson working in patient education, labor and delivery, in the out-patient clinic, and mother and baby care since 1978. In an interview for this article, Terry explained, “In transforming Jefferson into a true Baby-Friendly Hospital, one of the biggest challenges that the committee identified was educating staff other than nurses about the importance of following the steps and insuring that mothers who choose to not breastfeed receive sufficient education for formula preparation. Our end goal is really to send parents and babies home with all of the information, confidence, and skills that are required to keep the baby healthy.”

Now, for the first hour after delivery, hospital staff support mothers in initiating and maintaining “skin to skin” contact with their newborns. This uninterrupted hour with the baby curled up at the mother’s chest allows moms to bond with their child, stabilize the child’s temperature, calm the baby and to try to obtain the first breastfeed. Sleeping with the baby in the room helps moms and their families understand and interpret their child’s feeding cues.

Being a Baby-Friendly Hospital involves serious commitment from hospital leadership and from all departments that support women and children’s services. Not only is staff time spent on developing and implementing trainings, new policies, and preparing for a rigorous 2-day audit, but there are costs involved, such as not accepting free samples from formula companies.

Jefferson has also worked to make the enterprise Baby-Friendly for working moms who are employees. There are several classes and resources for new parents: a free breastfeeding Warm Line, a dedicated phone

number for access to a lactation specialist; a free lunch time peer support group for new parents; free prenatal breastfeeding classes; a class for grandparents; and lactation lounges on all of the campuses (but not yet in every building). There is even a new working mothers’ group forming as a result of the Jefferson’s Culture Jam, an employee engagement initiative.



On August 23, 2016, Jefferson received the prestigious baby-friendly designation.

Just two months later, Jefferson also became recognized by the State of Pennsylvania’s Health Department and the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics through Keystone 10, the state baby-friendly designation. Jefferson is also involved with local efforts around promoting breastfeeding. Since 2011, Jefferson has participated in a city-wide taskforce on breastfeeding organized by the Maternity Care Coalition and the City’s Department of Public Health. The taskforce has been critical for professionals in learning about obstacles and opportunities for breastfeeding and for sharing concerns that other organizations other than their own have identified.

Jefferson is now working with Abington Hospital and other hospitals in the city to assist them with their designation.

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