

BPNI STATEMENT

On

COUNSELLING WOMEN ON BREASTFEEDING AND INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING: HOW, WHEN AND BY WHOM

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) organised a global webinar on 31st July 2020 titled “**Counselling Women on Breastfeeding and Infant and Young Child Feeding: How, When and by Whom**”. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, the World Health Organisation HQs and ERA's Lucknow Medical College & Hospital, Lucknow collaborated. The HCL Foundation supported this webinar.

Three hundred and thirty six (336) participants from 100 cities/towns from 27 States and Union Territories of India attended the webinar. Participants belonged to diverse domains/sectors including nutrition and health, academicians, researchers, public health, lactation counsellors, advocacy groups, legal experts, hospitals, medical colleges, national and international agencies, universities, home science, government agencies including Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women and Child Development, UNICEF, and Civil society organisations.

The webinar proved to be a good interactive exercise as participants asked 75 questions related to the subject, which included limited access to lactation counselling, nutritional needs of a lactating women, effectiveness of alternative methods of counselling like using video counselling, time constraint being faced by the health care providers and challenges being faced by the mothers in hospitals after delivery.

Expert from the WHO headquarters provided updated information on the Global recommendations on breastfeeding counselling. The Child Health expert at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, shared about Government initiatives on IYCF counselling. The Department of Pediatrics of a medical college Lucknow talked about components of breastfeeding counselling. BPNI expert talked on the existing gaps, interventions and recommendations on breastfeeding counselling.

Based on the discussions and deliberations at the webinar, the participants:

- **Concerned** that in spite of having 79% institutional births as reported in the NFHS -4, only 2 out of 5 women in India are able to begin breastfeeding within one hour of birth. It is interesting to note that initiation is 81.4% by the end of first day. It shows the willingness of the mothers to start breastfeeding. What they need is proper information and support through skilled counselling, which may improve the practice of early initiation;

- **Further concerned** that the exclusive breastfeeding, which is high during the first two months, falls rapidly, and it reaches from 72.5% at 2 months to 41.5% at 6 months. Introduction of plain water and other milks gradually increases from 2 months to 6 months. This is the period when the mother needs effective counselling to continue practicing exclusive breastfeeding;
- **Acknowledge** the evidence based recommendations of the WHO: that breastfeeding counselling should be provided **to all pregnant women and to mothers with young children**, during the antenatal period and post-natally and up to 24 months or longer at least 6 times, and additionally as needed;
- **Recognise that WHO advises** face-to-face counselling by appropriately trained healthcare professionals and community-based lay and peer breastfeeding counsellors;
- **Note** that to support mothers with breastfeeding counselling, health and nutrition care providers need to acquire necessary skills through hands-on training;
- **Note** that the Government of India's Mothers Absolute Affection (MAA), Pradhanmantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyaan (PMSMA), Surakshit Matritva Aaswasan – SUMAN, Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses; Home based Newborn Care (HBNC) programme; Home Based Young Child Care (HBYC) programmes do include breastfeeding counselling by ASHA;
- **Recognise** that the National Guidelines on Lactation Management centers, recommend trained lactation support staff at the comprehensive lactation management centers, lactation management units and lactation support unit for counselling at each delivery point
- **Recognise** that the Global Strategy for Infant and young child feeding recommends, "Mothers should have access to skilled support to help them initiate and sustain appropriate feeding practices, and to prevent difficulties and overcome them when they occur." and the Global Breastfeeding Collective led by the WHO and UNICEF calls for improving access to skilled lactation counselling as part of comprehensive breastfeeding policies and programmes in health facilities;
- **Note** that counselling is a process and interaction between counsellors and pregnant women or mothers and not merely imparting knowledge to the women about breastfeeding. Counselling intends to empower women to breastfeed;
- **Recognise** that providing counselling to pregnant and lactating women on breastfeeding helps in building her confidence, improving feeding technique, preventing or resolving breastfeeding problems and adhering to the recommended optimal breastfeeding practices;
- **Recognise** the lack of competence of lactation management among the health care staff, or absence of the dedicated lactation counsellors;

We call upon the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of India for the following actions:

1. Appoint trained and competent lactation counsellors in the maternity services of the medical colleges, district hospitals, CHCs and PHCs. These lactation counsellors should receive a minimum of 7 day training on breastfeeding and lactation management.

2. Government of India should notify the same requirements in the private hospitals with maternity services.
3. Ensure in-service training of nurses working in maternity area through a 4 days lactation management training programme.
4. Government of India should notify that counselling on breastfeeding is done face to face and at least 6 times by 6 months as recommended by W.H.O. (in the antenatal period; during and immediately after birth (perinatal period up to the first 2–3 days after birth); at 1–2 weeks after birth (neonatal period); in the first 3–4 months (early infancy); at 6 months (at the start of complementary feeding); and after 6 months (late infancy and early childhood).
5. Government of India should notify that breastfeeding counselling takes place during one of the ANC sessions and is monitored as a key process indicator.

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Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI)

BP-33, Pitampura, Delhi-110034. India

Tel: +91-11-27312705, 42683059

Email: bpni@bpni.org, bpni.india@gmail.com

Website: www.bpni.org
