



Massachusetts
Breastfeeding Coalition

January 2, 2007

Dear Colleague:

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP); the Advisory Council of District 1 of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG); the Massachusetts section of the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; and the Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition, are writing to urge you to eliminate marketing of infant formula in your hospitals and offices. All major medical organizations, including AAP and ACOG, recommend that babies get no other food or drink besides breastmilk for the first six months of life. Research shows this recommendation is undermined when hospitals distribute formula company discharge bags to new mothers.

Seventy-seven percent of Massachusetts mothers initiate breastfeeding, but a mere 16.6% are exclusively breastfeeding at 6 months, according to 2005 data from the Centers for Disease Control.

Multiple studies show that when nursing mothers take home a commercial discharge bag, they are more likely to start using formula—even if the formula has been removed from the bag (Cochrane Data Base Systematic Review, 2000; 2:CD002075). The practice also encourages formula-feeding mothers to buy the expensive brand that was recommended by the hospital, even if this results in a financial hardship, as these brands often cost 66% more than store brands.

On April 8, 2006, the Advisory Council of District 1 ACOG (which includes New England and part of Quebec) passed a resolution stating: “. . . The obstetrician-gynecologists of ACOG District I strongly discourage hospitals from marketing branded infant formula products and/or gifts on hospital premises.”

National ACOG states in Education Bulletin #258 from July, 2000: “Care providers should be aware that the giving of gift packs with formula to breastfeeding women is commonly a deterrent to continuation of breastfeeding. A professional recommendation of the care and feeding products in the gift pack is implied. Physicians may conclude that noncommercial educational alternatives or gift packs without health related items are preferable.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics' policy statement from February 2, 2005 lists the following among its objectives: “Work actively toward eliminating hospital policies and practices that discourage breastfeeding (eg, promotion of infant formula in hospitals including infant formula discharge packs and formula discount coupons . . .)”

Other organizations who discourage or oppose this practice include: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Massachusetts Medical Society, the American Public Health Association, the World Health Organization, and the Government Accountability Office.

We encourage you to add your name to the list of eleven Massachusetts hospitals and birth centers who have eliminated this marketing practice: Boston Medical Center, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Cambridge Birth Center, Cambridge Hospital, Caritas St. Elizabeth's Medical Center of Boston, Franklin Medical Center, Lowell General Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, Melrose-Wakefield Hospital, North Shore Birth Center, and Newton Wellesley Hospital.

You have the opportunity to give out bags that market your own hospital, instead of marketing an expensive formula product. The commercial bags are often overstocked, taking up valuable storage space, and they require nursing time to stock and handle them. When the kits get recalled for defective formula, as happened on September 15, 2006, this adds to the hospital's liability, and compels staff to track which patients received which lot numbers and then contact those patients.

New mothers deserve our support. We believe that hospitals should market health, and nothing else. We would be pleased to work with you on helping to eliminate this practice.

Sincerely,



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