

A Family Medicine - Based Breastfeeding Medicine Elective for 4th Year Medical Students: Outcomes of the First Three Years

RUTGERS

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BACKGROUND

- Breastfeeding and human lactation has traditionally not been integrated consistently into medical school curricula.
- In view of its vital importance to the health of women, children and families, breastfeeding education of healthcare professionals has become a priority among public health and medical associations, including the American Academy of Family Physicians.
- A pilot project was begun in 2015, consisting of a one- to two-week elective offered to 4th year medical students through the Department of Family and Community Medicine.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

The curriculum included:

- Preliminary online course work
- Rounding with lactation consultants at two teaching hospitals; participants encouraged to keep a log of clinical breastfeeding situations encountered
- Attendance at a new mothers' support group mediated by lactation consultant
- Completion of an evidence-based clinical question project related to lactation
- Breastfeeding medicine office and home visit consultations with the clinical director of the course, a family physician with certification by the International Board of Lactation Consultants and Fellow of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine

PARTICIPANTS

- Throughout 3 years of the elective, 6-7 students per year have participated and the course has also been taken by 3 family medicine residents.
 - The majority of participants chose the 2- week course over the 1- week course.
 - All participants were female.
 - Participants' planned postgraduate training included family medicine, pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology.
 - Students took a pretest. The aggregate mean score for was 77.2% with median score 79% and a range from 54-93%.
 - Questions answered correctly included anatomy, physiology, benefits of breastfeeding
 - Questions answered incorrectly included medications, contraindications to breastfeeding, management of common problems, hospital policies.
- "I use my knowledge from the ...elective all the time....I am so much more comfortable when moms ask me questions and I also know what resources to use." KB 4th year student.*

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- It is feasible for a department of family medicine to provide a breastfeeding elective at the 4th year level and may also be adaptable for family medicine residencies.
- Medical students gained experience evaluating breastfeeding dyads in a variety of clinical situations, including normal breastfeeding counseling and management of common problems.
- Though students choosing the elective were likely self-selected, their pretest scores demonstrated significant knowledge gaps, suggesting that current breastfeeding education at the medical school level may be lacking.
- An elective at this level may be particularly helpful for those who are planning careers in primary care of the maternal-infant dyad, including family medicine, pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology.
- Other approaches may be needed in order to educate medical students going into other medical and surgical specialties, as breastfeeding mothers and children require care by other medical professionals, who should be familiar with basic principles of lactation.



Physician's Pledge To Promote, Protect
And Support Breastfeeding

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Dr. Terri Nordin, who originated the curriculum, Kathleen Mahoney, APN-C, and lactation consultant educators: Lysanne Loucel, IBCLC; Betty Pro, IBCLC; Olga Emerson, MS, RNC, IBCLC; Viviana Franyutti, IBCLC and Rachel Cruz, BSN, RNC-NIC, IBCLC.

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