

Breast Feeding Promotion



D. K. Tank

It gives me great joy to write this editorial to an issue of the FOGSI Journal that is dedicated to promote the cause of breast feeding.

When we took up the cause of breast feeding a number of professionals were stupefied. Surely they said breast feeding is so much a part of our culture that we don't need to promote it. They were probably as startled as I was when I learnt the following facts :

- Only 50% of women initiate breast feeding within 24 hours after birth !
- Only 64% of women are being exclusively breast fed at the end of one month and 37% at the end of 4 months.
- Eighty five percent of women discard colostrum !
- Seventy five percent of women use prelacteal feeds !
- Thirty one percent women use bottle / formula feeds!

Alright they said but why the emphasis on breast feeding and why is it so important after all? I submit to you the following facts :

- Breast feeding saves 6 million infants. Much more than immunisation and oral rehydration solution combined.
- A nonbreast fed infant is 14 times more likely to die of diarrhoea, 3 times more likely to die of respiratory

infection, and twice as likely to die of other infections than an exclusively breast fed child.

- With its wide ranging immunological properties, colostrum protects the new born against a host of bacterial and viral infections and allergies.
- Breast milk is safe, sterile and nutritionally complete.
- Breast milk is economical and environment friendly.
- Breast feeding encourages early bonding between the mother and the child.

The challenge before us was how best a body like FOGSI with a strength of 12,000 qualified obstetricians and gynecologists would be helpful in the delivery of reproductive health care. We realized that promoting reproductive health care without adequate emphasis on breast feeding was indeed a job half done.

To meet this challenge a number of initiatives were launched and we carried out the following:

- The year 1997 was declared the Breast Feeding Promotion Year - 1997.
- We had printed slogans on all FOGSI envelopes and the letterhead of the Federation to propogate breast feeding.
- One issue of the Indian Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology was devoted to the many aspects of breast feeding and its correct practice.
- A booklet on "Breast Feeding Your Baby" edited by the Chairperson of the FOGSI Perinatology committee Dr. Duru Shah and Ms K. Seth had been released at the World Congress on Labour and Delivery and is now available with the office.
- A 3 hour programme has been developed at the FOGSI in the form of lectures and videotape which can be organised at all the societies.
- Have conducted and have plans to conduct more workshops of Safe Motherfood which also emphasize breast feeding.
- Will hold training programmes on lactation management.
- Plan to establish continous teaching and research.

- Will have FOGSI mother and child friendly initiative funded by the Dr C. G. Saraiya MCH Foundation with collaboration from the UNICEF at the LTMMG hospital.

We declared the 1997 as FOGSI's Breast Feeding Promotion Year 1997. With this call from FOGSI, all 126 Societies responded with unprecedented enthusiasm. We sent extensive literature and videotapes to spread the message of breast feeding promotion. With every communication they received during the year, the Federation members were reminded of this objective. The continuing effort is to have two key trainers for every society of the Federation who will not only conduct the workshops for the obstetricians but also for all the health providers and the community at large. The first initiative of this nature was taken when 40 key trainers were instructed in the State of Maharashtra. Gujarat state is the next state where this program will be initiated. The government has already accepted the proposal and concrete planning is well under way. The next State will be Uttar Pradesh, and gradually the whole country will be involved.

A large number of Workshops all over the country were conducted on promotion of breast feeding and more important by its memberbodies on their own initiative. The finances required were met with the assistance from the UNICEF and the government of India at both the State and National level.

Breast feeding is a skill which though partly nature also needs to be nurtured. We as obstetricians who guide a mother through 9 months of her life are in a unique position to nurture this habit.

Promotion of breast feeding on an individual level is a subtle art with blending of thoughtful suggestions and conveying accurate information over a period of time. There is perhaps no better time to do this than during an antenatal period where a breast examination should be made a routine.

We urge obstetricians to consider labour complete only when breast feeding has been successfully established. This should become an integral part of labour room management and as such a moral and professional duty on part of the obstetricians. Though not as glamorous as the surgical part of our profession, teaching a mother how to breast feed her child brings no less a feeling of professional achievement. It deserves the same skill, concern and thought that we allot to the other aspects of our profession.

This issue of our Journal on Breast Feeding Promotion would not have been possible but for the sincere efforts of the Editor in Charge Dr. R. D. Pandit who has put in a lot of hard work and also on the choice of authors of the articles. We shall always remain indebted to him.

I wish to thank all the contributors to this issue for a job well done. I am sure that this issue of the journal will be stored and used as a reference and a guide for workers in the field.

I cannot however help thinking like Robert Browning that "there are miles to go and promises to keep"...

Dr. D. K. Tank
Guest Editor