



Unit II – Problem 5 – Handout #1: Baby Friendly Hospital

Sound nutrition for infants and young children is the basis for child survival and health development. Although the practice of breast-feeding declined significantly during this century in favour of commercially prepared infant formulae, an increasing body of scientific evidence in recent years demonstrates the critical importance of breast-feeding to the health of the baby and the mother. It provides the ideal nutrition immunities from the mother from the first hour of life, thus reducing the incidence and severity of infectious diseases and thereby lowering infant morbidity and mortality. More than a million children around the world would not have died last year if all mothers had been able to effectively breast-feed. Breast-feeding also significantly reduces by up to half the prospect of breast cancer, which now affects one in nine women during their lifetime in a country such as the United States.

In 1991, WHO and UNICEF, at a joint meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding, concluded that among the many factors that affected the patterns of infant and young child feeding were the inappropriate practices in hospitals and other maternity services, lack of knowledge and skills among health workers and the marketing of breast milk substitutes. It is for this reason that WHO and UNICEF are launching an initiative for “Baby Friendly”. Hospitals, which is directed at the three obstacles cited above. The policy basis of the Baby Friendly designation is manifest in the WHO-UNICEF Joint Statement on Protecting, promoting and supporting Breast-Feeding: The special Role of Maternity Services. The statement includes a summary guide of “Ten Steps to successful Breast-Feeding” which should be observed and supported by all maternity services and would serve as criteria for designation as a “Baby Friendly Hospital”.

The idea is to process on the needs of the mother and her newborn. To become Baby-Friendly, Hospitals, Health Centers and Clinics must practice each of ten steps to successful breast-Feeding developed by UNICEF and WHO, these are:

1. Have a written breast-feeding policy.
2. Train all health staff to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits of breast-feeding.
4. Help mother to initiate breast-feeding within half an hour of birth.
5. Show mothers the best way to breast-feed.
6. Give newborn infants no feed or drink other than breast-milk, unless medically indicated.
7. Practice “rooming in” by allowing mothers and babies to remain together 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breast-feeding on demand.
9. Give no artificial teats, pacifiers, dummies or soothers.
10. Help start breast-feeding support groups and refer mothers to them.