LACTATION CONSULTANT

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LACTATION CONSULTANT

Lactation consultants (LCs) are trained to teach others about breastfeeding and to aid mothers in feeding their infants. They recognize problems, counsel patients and apply principles of physiology related to lactation.

WHERE ARE THEY?

Lactation consultants practice in hospitals, doctor offices, midwife organizations, group support settings, and in independently-owned businesses.

EDUCATION

Certification must be earned via testing by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE). There are two avenues to BEGIN requirements for the exam:

Be a healthcare professional (RN, physician, pharmacist, etc) OR complete coursework in 14 specific health science subjects set by the IBLCE

3 requirements before the IBLC exam
1. Health Science Education
2. Lactation Specific Education
3. Lactation Specific Clinical

COMUNICATION

Lactation consultants must be personable and have a good bedside manner. Patients come to LCs because they have questions or need help. There is a need to help mothers relax when trying to correct and counsel.

CHALLENGES

LCs face the challenge of social stigmas on breastfeeding and lack of support, even from other healthcare professionals. Bottles and formula get pushed onto new mothers without offering assistance and knowledge on breastfeeding. LCs consistently battle poor information given to mothers about the logistics and mechanics of breastfeeding. Too few LCs are available to new mothers.

RESEARCH BY LACTATION CONSULTANTS

• Effect of early skin-to-skin on breastfeeding
• Work status on breastfeeding mothers and its effects on feeding
• Breastfeeding among mothers on opioid medication maintenance
• Breastfeeding outcomes of very low birth-weight newborns
• Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative

BABY-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL

Is an initiative launched in 1991 by WHO and Unicef to improve rates of breastfeeding successful starts. There are currently 468 US hospitals of almost 3500 (2.92% of US hospitals) that are designated. The goal for Healthy People 2020 is 8.1% of hospitals to reach this standard.

BABY-FRIENDLY RESEARCH

• “Are you baby-friendly? Knowledge deficit among US maternity staff”
Calls were made to almost 3000 hospitals and asked if the hospitals were baby-friendly. 62% said that the hospital was and 15% did not know what that meant. Accuracy varied based on job titles and IBCLC were most accurate. 1
• “Systematic review of evidence for baby-friendly initiative step 3”
Findings show that consulting interventions, whether “prenatal, intrapartum or postpartum are effective in increasing breastfeeding initiation, duration or exclusivity.” 2
• “Effect of dedicated lactation support services in extremely low birthweight neonates”
Results show that an increase in the number of lactation consultants caused an increase in the number of infants that received human milk as first feed and overall increased the number of babies receiving human milk vs being exclusively formula-fed. 3

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

These research findings implicate lack of knowledge among current nursing staff and too few available lactation consultant. Nurses are in a great position to become LCs. Human milk is an important source of natural nutrition for infants, yet social stigmas have caused this route to fall out of practice and many nurses lack knowledge to assist new mothers.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I believe there should be more education on lactation and newborn feeding during nursing school. Research findings show that current nurses are not very knowledgeable and if the subject was a more integrated section during education, more nurses would have the knowledge necessary to help new mothers in regards to breastfeeding. I am passionate in this area and have first-hand appreciation of caring, knowledgeable LCs. After completing my BSN, I believe this may be an avenue that I explore for my career.

SOURCES