

Breastfeeding is a gift from mother to infant. Welcome to SBH Bronx health talk, produced by SBH health system and broadcast from the beautiful studios at St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, I'm Faith Daniel. Breastfeeding has been proven to have significant health benefits to both mom and baby. For Mom it can decrease her future chances of diabetes, ovarian, and uterine cancer. For baby it enhances brain development and provides immunities to diseases. Yet in some Bronx communities, particularly in black and Hispanic communities, the rates of exclusive breastfeeding are lower than the average. With me today is Julie Crocco director of midwifery at St. Barnabas Hospital to discuss the importance of breastfeeding. Welcome Julie.

You're Welcome

And happy breastfeeding Awareness Month

That's correct

August is a big one! I know SBH is on the journey to becoming a baby friendly hospital. So could you talk to us about what that means and the importance of it?

Sure, baby friendly is a designation. It's given out by baby

friendly USA, and it supports the fact that we have accomplished the ten steps to successful breastfeeding, and instituted the international code of marketing breast milk substitutes. So it's a long process. St. Barnabas service has been on this process for four years. There's four phases we are in the final phase, the designation phase. So that means that we've done our policy changes, we've instituted our staff training, the patient training, and we have instituted changes in the labor room and the postpartum in the clinic to support breastfeeding and keeping moms and babies together.

What kind of changes have we implemented so far?

Well the biggest one and one of the first ones that we initiated was skin-to-skin. So traditionally babies were born, they were given to moms, quickly put into a warmer. But, baby friendly which is the latest research has proven that putting babies skin-to-skin has benefits both for mom and baby, so for baby it calms the baby, it decreases their stress hormones, it warms the baby, it controls their blood sugar, their blood pressure, their respirations. so mom has a smell it's the same smell from inside, the baby feels comforted and hears the moms heartbeat, and the baby relaxes. For mom, it controls her breathing, it controls her breathing and her and her vital signs, but also it controls the amount of blood she loses because oxytocin is released.

Oxytocin is the love hormone, she has this little baby, she's loving her little baby, her body is releasing oxytocin, and she is causing her uterus to contract and control bleeding, as well as bonding well with her baby.

So it seems like even that initiation process like the skin-to-skin is already such a positive, having a positive impact health-wise. So could you talk a little bit more about the positive impact that breastfeeding has on both mom and baby?

Well, every organization the American Academy of Pediatrics, ACOG, any organization you can think of will tell you that breast is best. And the truth is our mothers know that. When interviewed moms will for the most part 80% of the time say they intend to breastfeed. But when we started this process four years ago only 6% of our patients were breastfeeding on discharge, I mean exclusively breastfeeding. Now we're up to 20% and that's a huge accomplishment. St. Barnabas is not about exclusively breastfeeding neither is baby friendly about exclusive breastfeeding.

And what is exclusive breastfeeding mean for our audience?

So exclusive breastfeeding means that there are no formula substitutes, so babies are not getting anything other than breast

milk from the breast. We're encouraging moms to breastfeed for six months, introduce foods after six months, and continued for a year or two years afterwards.

So would exclusive breastfeeding also include if a mom was pumping?

Yes, there is a hierarchy for breastfeeding. The first is breast milk from the breast, second would be pumped breast milk, then third would be formula, so there is a hierarchy for that. But baby friendly would like us not to feed by nipples, not to feed by bottles, we would like to do temporary measures such as cup feedings, spoon feeding, syringe feeding a baby until a baby is awake and alert enough to start breastfeeding at the breast. So we would prefer that it would be breast milk from the breast, but we're also realistic, moms go back to work, they need to pump they need to supply that milk to their babies.

And I know you mentioned which is like a jarring accomplishment that we went from six almost twenty percent. Could you speak a little bit about why people commonly were choosing not to exclusively breastfeed in this community?

Well, that's a very complicated phenomenon. Maybe it's because they have to go back to work, they have jobs that don't

support breast feeding, so they have to go back very quickly. Our maternity leave in the United States is very short so moms go back even when they have leave after three months which is really not long enough to continue with your breastfeeding successfully. There are no role models because maybe mom didn't breastfeed or maybe your sister didn't breast feed. There is a national statistic that shows that patients who are new to the country, immigrants tend to breastfeed less and I have a personal experience with that. My mom came here and she was 18, she had six children and she formula-fed all six children, she formula-fed us because she was in the United States and she was now affluent, where at home in her country she would have had to breastfeed. So she chose to formula feed because the formula companies have such a powerful marketing in the United States that she thought formula was better than breast.

Right and I think a lot of people have that misconception about like breastfeeding, formula, and there's a lot of myths that come with it. I know my best friend she just had a baby a year ago and she didn't breastfeed because she was worried about like her breasts sagging. So could you talk a little bit more about the myths or concerns that people have and like dispelling them like this is not right people?

There are a lot of myths out there, sagging breasts is one,

pregnancy and changes that come along with pregnancy or what caused the sagging breasts, it is not the actual breast feeding that causes that. Another big myth is that your breast is too small you won't be able to produce enough milk. That's not true breastfeeding is a supply and demand system so as long as you have your baby sucking, your big body will make milk, you move the milk, you'll produce more milk. Most moms stop breastfeeding because they feel they don't have enough milk, and if they formula feed and breastfeed they probably will not have enough breast milk; it's a supply and demand system. So if you want to have enough milk for your baby you have to continually put that baby to the breast, and that brings me back to why one of the other changes we've made is we keep moms and babies together for the entire hospital stay so mom is able to look at her baby in the crib. No more nurseries, she looks at her baby in the crib and she sees the baby making feeding cues we used to feed by the clock, every two hours, every three hours. Now, research has shown us that babies are talking to us, when they suck, when they stick their tongue out, when they yawn, when they have eye movements that go around the room, they're talking to us and they're saying they would like to eat. If you put a baby in a nursery then mom doesn't get to see that and she misses an opportunity to feed.

Right

So by keeping moms and babies together for their entire hospital stay moms have more success at breastfeeding because they're producing more milk on discharge.

Right, and for the moms that unfortunately can't breastfeed, for the moms that say adopted their baby, what are the alternatives if they still want their baby to be breastfed?

That's pretty hard right now, I think we need to make a lot of movement in that area there are breast milk banks so here at St. Barnabas we do not offer donor milk but many of NICU's in the Bronx area do or offer donor milk from preterm babies who, who have moms who can't or don't breastfeed they, they can have donor milk from a milk bank. So there are some commercial milk banks where an adoptive mother could purchase milk it's quite expensive

Is it covered by insurance?

For the preemie babies yes, and for the preemie babies it's very easy to get. New York is way ahead of many many other states in this area and so we can get preemie milk reimbursed by insurance. However I have to tell you that it's a success at St. Barnabas since we started the baby friendly initiative, the NICU has more breast milk stored in their refrigerator than ever

before.

That's awesome

So that means their NICU babies are going home with moms pumping and bringing back milk.

That's amazing

For feeds here at the hospital also because I now work in the postpartum area if we have an antepartum mother who's gonna deliver it before 37 weeks and she's admitted. I have a chance to sit and talk with her and tell her how her baby will go home faster as a premature baby if she if she breastfeeds, how her baby will gain weight faster if she breastfeeds, how her baby is less likely to be coming with any infections in the NICU if she breastfeeds, and so we have a lot more premature mothers breastfeeding as a result of the education from the baby friendly initiative.

Do you have any stories from moms that came in that are like, I am NOT breastfeeding, and then you talk to them and you did your magic touch and they changed their mind?

They're gonna think you set me up, um you know we have

monthly baby showers and I had a midwife helping me host the shower and she had breastfed her baby. Her baby is two years old and she's still breastfeeding her baby and I asked her to speak at the baby shower about her breastfeeding experience, and there were these two women sitting side-by-side one was the pregnant mother and the other was the godmother, and they were giving her such a hard time. One of the women said this is I'm having my seventh baby; I didn't breastfeed my other six. They were all smart, they were all healthy, they're all you know doing well in school, and you know they're not sick. and and she kept trying to counteract everything that they said. But eventually we said you know what breastfeeding is not for everyone and baby friendly doesn't make everybody breastfeed we only want moms to have an informed choice so we said that to her, "you know you don't have to breastfeed St. Barnabas is not going to make you breastfeed we just want to make sure that you know the importance of breastfeeding. well sure enough she delivered two nights ago she's going home today.

oh my gosh!

And when I walked in the room I said to her I know you, as she said to me, yeah from the baby shower and I said, and you weren't gonna breastfeed and her baby was attached to her breast then she said I know but I thought I'd give it a try and she

said and you know what I like it and here she had my seventh baby and she went ahead and breastfed and we were just thrilled I asked her I said we come back to the baby shower and give a testimonial, she said yeah!

She's amazing I'm sure you must feel so happy to know that like you know the work that you do isn't in vain.

It's not in vain and it's one patient at a time because this community needs this education more than anyone. The entire Bronx has recognized, the Department of Health is supporting almost every hospital to become baby friendly. We are so progressive here in New York, and I think we're gonna make a big difference.

I think so too

St. Barnabas is not about exclusivity we don't care what our exclusivity rate is we just know that when interviewed 80% of the mothers want to breastfeed but on discharge very few word exclusively breastfeeding in six months only 33 % of that 80 are breastfeeding, and in a year only 15% so there's work to be done and we'll do it one patient at a time if we have to.

And is there anything so say there's a mom that's like on the

fence, and you had one minute to explain everything and be like I want to educate you on this and encourage you to sway. What would you say?

I would say that breastfeeding is a choice, it is not natural, it is a learned behavior, you need support we are here at the hospital to support you, we are offering you assistance when you are discharged, we are instituting techniques that allow you to be successful at breastfeeding, like skin-to-skin, like 24-hour rooming in, like no separation of moms and babies, even for you know procedures other than circumcisions. So we're offering you the support we're here for you if you like it great, if you if you do it for a month great, if you do it for six months fantastic, it's all individual. If you don't want to breastfeed we'll support you will support you in safe ways to formula feed your baby you know. And we recognize that formula companies are powerful, they have given hospitals formula for free for years, and formula is the number one marked up food product in the country. So even though they're giving it to the hospital for free they're passing on that expense to moms. Your baby will be healthier, you will be happier, the community will be stronger. You'll be able to go to work more because your child is not sick as frequently. You have a less chance of having breast and ovarian cancer. Your child has a less chance of having obesity and high blood pressure and diabetes later on in their life. Try it.

The benefits are endless.

Try it! Right well we can say.

Awesome, right. Are there any helpful resources you would recommend a breastfeeding mother to check out if she wants to learn more or need some support?

There is an abundance of information. In the clinic right now we're giving a brand-new handout that talks about feeding cues and no pacifier use. We're recognizing that you need more. Where's we're recommending that you go to WIC because WIC doesn't just give formula they are huge breastfeeding supporters, they have lactation consultants there for free, they can help you with any issues that you are having with breastfeeding. We have a breastfeeding cafe from a local community resource that we are now recommending to our patients on discharge. Youtube is filled, watch a YouTube on breast crawl, learn how it's a natural response for your baby to crawl up and start breastfeeding without any assistance. The resources are endless, so are the formula advertisements, so be careful stop accepting those coupons moms. Moms who breastfeed can save up to \$3,000 a year on formula WIC does not pay for all of your formula, even if you choose to formula

feed, so you're still a savings if you go ahead and breastfeed.

Nice, yeah there's so many benefits it's endless, its economic, its social, its health, its physical, and I think one's moms have the autonomy and the education to make those decisions I have confidence that they will.

and that's what baby friendly is all about.

Right, right so thank you so much Julie for joining us at SBH Bronx health talk! Again for more information on breastfeeding or other services available at SBH health system visit sbhny.org. Thank you for joining us.