



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Hospitals Work to Change the Landscape to Support Breastfeeding

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BRATTLEBORO – Nursing is not all about milk, Dawn Kersula, a lactation consultant at the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital Birthing Center tells new parents soon after their baby is born.

“What we now know, and what more and more studies have shown is that you want the child to have that skin-to-skin contact,” Kersula said. “The luxuriousness of skin to skin between a baby and a mother is so important, the sights and sounds and feelings for the baby....”

Throughout August, a “Change the Landscape: Support Breastfeeding in Our Community” campaign is underway in Vermont. Life-sized, stand-up images of nursing mothers are appearing in libraries and parks, businesses, shops and other places – and hospitals all around the state – as a way to encourage people to talk about how we can support breastfeeding.



“Hospitals play a big role in helping mothers and their newborns succeed in breastfeeding,” said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. “I congratulate Vermont’s hospital leaders and staff for their work to change the landscape to support breastfeeding as the healthiest start in life.”

Twenty years ago, Kersula became the second International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) in Vermont, and she has taught six-week Lamaze classes for more than two decades in Brattleboro. She has seen a number of policy changes in hospitals over the years that are designed to strengthen the bond between mother and child – and encourage breast feeding as early and as often as possible.

Thirty years ago at most hospitals, a newborn baby, soon after birth, would be separated from the mother and brought to another room where a nurse would monitor the child’s vital signs. That was when the obstetricians at Brattleboro Memorial began gently placing each newborn into the arms of the mother as soon after birth and for as long as possible.

“They used to assign one nurse for the baby and one for the mother, and now we have one nurse that treats the mother and child as a couplet – and it works,” Kersula said. “We made a list for nurses to sign if they thought it wasn’t working, and no one signed. Everyone could see how beneficial it was to keep the mother and baby together. That was 15 years ago – and we’ve never looked back.”

Brattleboro Memorial Hospital has long worked to promote breastfeeding. The hospital was the second in Vermont to open a birthing room (the first was in Bellows Falls). Robert Nassau, MD, now retired, worked with local LaLeche League leaders and nurses, and wrote one of the first hospital breastfeeding policies in the state. Kathy Anderson, a former vice president of patient care at the hospital, was also very focused on promoting women’s health, Kersula said.

The changes didn’t end there. In the past five years The Birthing Center has stopped the practice of giving formula company “gift bags,” and three nurses are also International Board Certified Lactation Consultants. This year, with Dr. Susan Slowinski of Cornerstone Pediatrics at the helm, they’ve undertaken a survey of all birthing mother to find out more about how they made their feeding decision, which will help determine practices in the hospital and in doctors’ offices to increase the duration of breastfeeding.

Helping a new mother bond with her child and learn to breastfeed is a “magical experience” that continually surprises anyone who works in a birthing room, Kersula said. “I still love it. I have never had a father or mother who didn’t want to be a better mom or dad. They all want to be good parents. That’s what keeps it fresh for me.”

Everyone can help change the landscape to support breastfeeding:

Look for the life-sized stand-up images of breastfeeding mothers and babies. Each model will be wearing a “Flash Bag™” filled with buttons and postcards. Take a button to wear and a postcard to fill out to enter a drawing for the Flash Bag™.

Join the conversation on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/HealthVermont>

Post photos of your sightings of the breastfeeding “standees” wherever you see them around the state. Upload a photo and tell us where you saw it.

Share your story about who was/is your biggest breastfeeding supporter. Was it your partner, employer, neighbor, doctor, mother or grandmother? Share your experience and support other moms by posting on our Facebook page.

Nominate your favorite breastfeeding-friendly business or employer to be recognized by Vermont's **Breastfeeding Friendly Project**. Help us acknowledge them and encourage other businesses to support breastfeeding, too. Post to the Wall the name of the business and town it is in, and say a few words about how they support breastfeeding.

Visit <http://www.HealthVermont.gov/YouCanDolt> to learn more about the campaign, the importance of breastfeeding and health, and what individuals can do to support breastfeeding in their communities.

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