

Improving Support for Breastfeeding Employees

The CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice in every community setting.

As major employers and health leaders, hospitals can help establish strong community norms for promoting healthy and active living through nutritious food and beverage, opportunities for physical activity, support for breastfeeding, and tobacco-free environments. This P2P Series presents case studies of hospitals improving their environment to better support the health of their employees and embody the mission of their organization.

IN THIS ISSUE...

Read about the methods used by Pennsylvania Hospital and Lifespan to create a culture of support for their breastfeeding employees.

Breastfeeding Support: The Whole Package

Pennsylvania Hospital is committed to supporting continued lactation for employees when they return to work. To better understand the needs of breastfeeding employees, all hospital administrators, managers and supervisors were invited to take a psychometrically tested breastfeeding support questionnaire. Based on the results, the hospital developed a program of support. "We saw a need to package the breastfeeding support materials for employees in a way that makes it easy for managers to point employees in the right direction," said Debi Ferrarello, Director of Family Education. Now, when employees first contact Human Resources about taking maternity leave, they receive a packet of information about breastfeeding, how to get started, where to get help if they need it and how to prepare to return to work. Information is also available on the hospital intranet site and through links to external online resources. Ferrarello said, "Employees also receive an insulated milk transport bag, ice packs, and an invitation to attend a free, prenatal breastfeeding course, thus setting the expectation that breastfeeding is the norm."

Pennsylvania Hospital also sets breastfeeding as a norm through policy and practice. The hospital lactation policy is based on the federal law to provide reasonable break time and a private, nonbathroom place for nursing mothers to express milk at work. The hospital offers discounts on breast pump rentals and purchases, and maintains a free breastfeeding "warmline" staffed by International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) for mothers to call any time during their maternity leave or upon their return. Before returning to work full time, employees are encouraged to make a free appointment with an IBCLC to get acquainted with the four designated pumping areas. IBCLCs will also meet with employees and their managers to work out details of the break time and other necessary accommodations. Pennsylvania Hospital promotes breastfeeding as the healthy choice and works hard to make the healthy choice the easier choice for employees.

Key Considerations

- *Hospital lactation consultants can be a resource for managers and employees.*
- *The hospital Human Resources Department is a great avenue for relaying information about breastfeeding services to expecting mothers.*

Promotion Through Policy

Lifespan is a healthcare system with 12,000 employees working throughout four hospitals and a corporate office. Cindy Scott, Workforce Development Specialist, oversees Lifespan's work-life initiative. For Scott, lactation policies fall directly under health and wellness and when the Rhode Island Nursing, Working Mother's Law was passed, she wanted to create a systemwide policy that would ensure Lifespan was in compliance with legislation and show support for nursing mothers. Using the Rhode Island law as a framework, Scott and her colleagues developed a policy stating, "Lifespan will promote and provide support for employees who choose to continue to breastfeed after returning to work by accommodating employees who need to pump during designated break times." The formal policy goes on to outline procedures and expectations for employees and their managers.

"Once the policy was formed, the next step was to communicate it to the hospitals and employees to let them know it was available," said Scott. With so many employees, communication is a challenge, but Scott worked with personnel from the employee health offices at each hospital to implement the policy. "Some of them took it upon themselves to create designated lactation rooms, which was our next step" Scott said. Space is incredibly difficult to find, but all four hospitals and the corporate office have designated lactation rooms. Even if the culture already seems supportive of breastfeeding, written guidelines can increase that support by providing a framework so employees and managers know exactly what to do.

The Lifespan corporate office and all four hospitals have been recognized as breastfeeding-friendly work sites by the State of Rhode Island Department of Health—a proud accomplishment for the organization. One hospital goes above and beyond by sending their employees congratulatory cards when they go on maternity leave that include information about all the breastfeeding services and support waiting for them when they return to work. There are several opportunities to promote breastfeeding and raise awareness about the services provided through the hospital. Scott said, "I think a lot of moms breastfeed while on maternity leave and wean when they come back to work because they don't think they have a choice to be able to pump at work. I am glad we are able to support them now."

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Key Considerations

- *Formal lactation procedures outline steps employees and managers can take to make it easier to continue breastfeeding after returning to work.*
- *Discussing hospital lactation policies with employees before they take maternity leave may reduce concerns upon their return to work.*