



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.

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Find out how University Medical Center and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia provide support for breastfeeding employees.

Key Considerations

- *One way to make the hospital environment more supportive of breastfeeding is to include it in the formal hospital employee wellness program.*
- *Communication between managers and employees is an important part of creating a breastfeeding friendly workplace.*

Setting a Standard of Support

University Medical Center (UMC) in Lubbock, Texas, takes a comprehensive approach to breastfeeding support. Shortly after implementing a policy to support breastfeeding among patients, UMC extended that support to its employees. "It made sense to not only provide a breastfeeding supportive environment for our maternity patients, but to also ensure we were supporting our employees that choose to return to work and breastfeed," said Sharon Shoulders, Director of Perinatal Services. UMC received the Texas Department of State Health Services Mother Friendly Recognition by implementing policies and practices to support work site lactation. Responsibilities are clearly outlined for all staff. Supervisors are expected to communicate the hospital policy to employees, be open to flexible breaks and create an atmosphere that enables an employee to confidently approach her supervisor about her plans to provide breast milk to her child.

Taking employee support one step further, the formal employee wellness program has recently embraced workplace lactation efforts. Through the wellness program, employees earn points for healthy behaviors and active participation. Recently, breastfeeding was included as one of the many healthy behaviors employees can choose. "Now, breastfeeding employees have incentives to continue breastfeeding by earning points for each month they breastfeed after returning to work. The points earned make them eligible for \$500 cash prize drawings per month" said Shoulders. She encourages other hospitals to reach out to their employee wellness staff saying, "It wasn't until we approached our wellness team and presented the benefits that they saw the correlation between breastfeeding and wellness and incorporated it into the formal program." Shoulders emphasizes the importance of using a formal process of assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating hospital lactation policies and procedures. She thinks hospitals will be surprised at the support they will find once people are aware of the numerous benefits of breastfeeding.

A Breastfeeding-Friendly Environment

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has spent the last several years making a concerted effort to support breastfeeding among employees. In 2000, nurses trained to assist patients with lactation wondered what could be done to support hospital employees after returning to work. The hospital answered by creating a formal employee lactation program with several components. Diane Spatz, Director of Lactation Services at the hospital, remembers some of the first steps the hospital took to improve support. "We created a plan to purchase hospital-grade breast pumps, put one in each inpatient unit and as hospital renovations were planned they would include additional pumping rooms," she said. The hospital now has 14 pump rooms available for employees.

"Being a network with facilities throughout the region, it was also important to establish a system to support employees in outlying facilities," said Spatz. To help do so, the hospital created a procedure to allow employees to borrow breast pumps. Employees simply submit a request through the hospital intranet and have a breast pump delivered to their work site free of charge. They use the pump as long as they need to and return it when finished. The system of loaner pumps can help with convenience and affordability.

To provide even more options, staff can also purchase a pump at a discounted rate. To make it as convenient as possible, employees can pay for a pump at the hospital cashier window and pick it up at the Occupational Health Office or mail in a check and have it delivered. Employees can purchase pumps for a spouse, daughter, sister, or friend. Since the program began two years ago, 227 pumps have been purchased.

Children's Hospital also offers expectant parent and prenatal breastfeeding classes several times per year and implemented a formal employee breastfeeding policy in March 2010. "Over the past 10 years, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has increased its commitment to providing an environment that acknowledges the importance of breastfeeding," said Spatz. An important part of that commitment is to the hospital employees and their families.



Key Considerations

- *Additional lactation rooms, located near employee work areas can make pumping at work more convenient for busy hospital staff.*
- *Innovative programs to increase employee access to pumps through purchase or borrow programs can support employees who choose to express breastmilk.*