

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...

Learn how Davis Memorial and Georgetown University Hospitals are improving access to private spaces for employee lactation.

Key Considerations

- *Engaging staff who work near lactation rooms can increase buy-in and help maintain the space.*
- *Local breastfeeding organizations may be able to help hospitals create a private place for lactation.*

Lactation location

Providing support for breastfeeding employees is a priority at **Davis Memorial Hospital (DMH)**. “Managers and leaders recognize that breastfeeding is something important their employees need to do when they come back to work and allow them the break time to do that,” said Julie Phillips, a registered nurse and educator at DMH. Along with supportive management and necessary break time, it was important for employees to have a private space for lactation. To help create that at DMH, Phillips applied for and received a grant from the West Virginia Breastfeeding Alliance.

“Our prior setup was a shared room that served as a place for lactation and doctors’ sleeping area, so we never really had a private place for them to go” said Phillips. After receiving the grant, DMH found a suitable space on the birthing center floor that was previously used as a waiting room and storage area. “If you really look and get creative, it doesn’t take a lot of space at all,” said Nancy Bross-Fregonara, Information Specialist for DMH, “if there is a desire it can be done.”

Once the space was made available, the other pieces fell into place. DMH used the grant money to purchase and install a hospital-grade breast pump. The hospital purchased a comfortable chair and plans are in place to add a mirror and bulletin board so mothers can share tips or post photos of their babies.

The location of the room also plays a part in its success. “Having it right in our Family Birthing Center is such a perfect location, the staff feels ownership of it and I think that is really important” says Bross-Fregonara. Phillips agrees: “many of the people involved in the room are nurses that work on the Labor and Delivery Unit and have a lot of experience working with breastfeeding moms, so they can observe and hear what the needs are.” An inconvenient location can make it harder for employees to use and maintain. Phillips and Bross-Fregonara advise other hospitals to think strategically about where to place a room and what resources are available to make it possible. “There are coalitions and groups willing to help and they may have grant money or other assistance to help create a space” said Phillips.

An Employee Haven

Breastfeeding support has been part of the culture at **Georgetown University Hospital** for a long time. Lactation services at the hospital first began in 1985 with a group of lactation consultants recognizing that they and their coworkers needed breast pumps, break time, and a private space to express milk. For several years an old computer room was used for employees to express milk, until the hospital's Ladies' Board asked to renovate an unused break room on the Labor and Delivery floor. That space, now called the Mother's Haven is used by Georgetown employees and mothers from the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Carol Ryan, Clinical Manager of the Perinatal Education Department and Lactation Services at Georgetown, understands the benefit of having the Mother's Haven. "The employees say this is one of the advantages of working here. It is good for retention and absenteeism" said Ryan. Continuing to breastfeed upon returning to work is difficult, but extra support from employers makes it easier. Employees at Georgetown are paid for their break time and have access to all of the lactation services and supplies at the hospital. Other employees also are an important part of the culture and provide 'colleague coverage' whenever possible.

An evaluation of the lactation services showed satisfaction among women who used the space, their feedback has been valuable for the hospital to ensure their needs are met. A sign-in system tells Ryan and her colleagues that employees use the room more than 200 times in a given month and NICU moms use it more than 100 times per month. Those numbers can be used to show the value of the space if it is called into question.

Ryan stresses the importance of knowing the local, state, and federal workplace breastfeeding laws. The Human Resources Department at Georgetown posts the local District of Columbia workplace breastfeeding law and the 'Reasonable Time for Nursing Mothers' section of the federal Patient Protection and Affordability Care Act policy throughout the hospital. Georgetown employees returning to work have a right to a private space and break time for milk expression. Knowing their rights can empower them while raising public and institutional awareness.



Key Considerations

- *Records of how frequently a lactation room is used can be a valuable tool for maintaining or expanding facilities.*
- *Cooperation with coworkers is an important part of the support system for breastfeeding employees.*

