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Breastfeeding Workshop Attracts Diverse Group of Providers

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Too often, breastfeeding educational events fail to attract or benefit individuals of diverse professional views. We are thus pleased to report on a recent day-long workshop by Miriam Labbok, MD, IBCLC. The impetus for the workshop was the training of IBCLC interventionists for 2 related NIH-funded trials of breastfeeding promotion interventions.^{1,2} Held at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York on January 30, 2008, the event drew 14 MDs, 3 MD/IBCLCs, 19 IBCLCs, 2 PhDs, 3 RNs, 7 RN/IBCLCs, and 9 others.

The workshop's success was in providing a forum for this diverse group to interact and share best practices, especially during breakout sessions on effective strategies for promoting exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) and tackling obstacles to EBF in the prenatal, hospital, and postpartum periods. Many novel strategies were presented. For example, a participating family physician said she helps mothers understand the importance of EBF by offering analogies that appeal to the particular patient's religious beliefs. She said she compares choosing EBF to choosing only one God or husband. Her comments reflect the clinical challenges presented by the fact that although breastfeeding initiation rates have increased, the rate of EBF has not.³

Participants expressed above all the importance of women establishing support networks that include providers, partners, family, and friends to maintain EBF. Consensus on the need for support underscores Dr. Labbok's discussion of breastfeeding from a human rights perspective. Dr. Labbok explains that when breastfeeding is understood within the human rights framework, the duties concomitant to a child's right to be breastfed lie not only with the mother, but with society, government and family.⁴ One of the greatest frustrations expressed by participants was that the shift that removed breastfeeding from the scope of what was "normal" resulted in societal neglect of these duties and institutions that create obstacles to EBF. Participants cited hospital rooming policies, early cord clamping, and swaddling among these barriers.

Several attendees, including Miriam Labbok, noted the rarity of having many physicians in attendance at a breastfeeding workshop. Research has shown that providers have an unparalleled positive impact upon breastfeeding initiation and exclusivity, supporting the

importance of breastfeeding education for all clinicians.^{5–7} Attendance at this workshop shows that physicians are recognizing their role within the multidisciplinary approach to supporting breastfeeding that is essential to ensuring that mothers receive breastfeeding support and assistance at each point during their care.

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