

Towards the development of evidence based clinical practice guidelines for human lactation

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Despite the importance of breastfeeding for both the mother and her baby, and the fact that approximately 30% of the mother's food energy intake is secreted as breastmilk, the lactating breast is the only significant human organ that does not have a line of referral from the Family Doctor to the Medical Specialist. Furthermore very little time has been allocated to breastfeeding in almost all Medical School curricula within Australia and overseas. Thus assistance given to mothers with breastfeeding difficulties is predominately from either health professionals (Child Health Nurses/Lactation Consultants) or community support groups (Australian Breastfeeding Association, LLL). This support is primarily 'experience-based' and results in mothers receiving conflicting advice, which has been shown to be very detrimental to successful breastfeeding outcomes. Currently in Australia 96% of mothers choose to breastfeed their newborn babies but this declines to 60% by six months post-partum and only 15% of these mothers are exclusively breastfeeding (Australian National Infant Feeding Survey, 2010). This contrasts with the WHO recommendation that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. Thus Australian mothers know that it is best to breastfeed their babies but they encounter difficulties that result in premature weaning at an early stage of lactation. The obvious solution to this problem is to provide the mothers with evidence based medical care. In Australia, the average new mother visits her Family Doctor 7.7 times in the first six months after giving birth (Gunn et al. J Paediatr. Child Health. 1996). Thus there is a great need to provide Family Doctors with 'evidence-based' (research-based) real time information for the assessment and management of breastfeeding difficulties.

To this end we are developing a web based programme, the Lactation Assessment and Management Programme (LAMP), that is designed to assist Family Doctors in real time, that is, at the time of the actual consultation with the mother and baby. Since, it is web based it will be equally available to city and country Doctors and will be modified for International use. Thus the Family Doctor will become the Medical

Specialists in this area of family medicine. Furthermore future versions will be available for other health Professionals and parents. LAMP will provide comprehensive 'evidence based' information that will enable more accurate diagnoses and management of lactation difficulties by the Family Doctor ensuring better short and long term health outcomes for mothers and babies. Briefly, LAMP is an intuitive programme that is divided into three sections, the normal breastfeeding relationship, the lactation assessment and management tool and Breastfeeding A-Z (reference index).