

## PRESS INFORMATION

### 11th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium 2016

#### **Human milk – the earlier it is given, the better!**

**Baar/Berlin, 15/16 April 2016. When a baby is born too early, the whole family can need a great deal of help, since they are suddenly faced with challenges they had not anticipated. The treatment pathway NeoPAss<sup>®</sup> focuses on the family, supporting the parents as well as the baby. An important aspect is infant nutrition: human milk is ideal, but often the mothers of very small newborns that are born very early are not yet producing milk. At the 11th Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium organised by Medela in Berlin, leading experts from around the world discussed the advantages of feeding babies with their own mother's milk and milk from human milk banks. Another topic that was discussed at length was how to best preserve bioactive substances in human milk.**

Ideally, family-integrated care should start before the birth and continue until after the mother and baby have been discharged from hospital, stressed Professor Dr Matthias Keller (Passau, Germany), during the presentation of NeoPAss<sup>®</sup>. Since this treatment pathway was introduced – a programme which focuses on the needs of the whole family and brings in the parents as the baby's central attachment figures from the beginning – it has been possible to discharge preterm babies from hospital earlier. Serious illnesses are less common and parents are more confident about looking after their baby. In addition, a significantly higher proportion of babies are being breastfed by the time they are discharged.

#### **Feeding premature babies – not as simple as you might thought**

Although it is not usually possible to breastfeed very small preterm babies, feeding them human milk – e.g. as part of a special feeding programme – should be considered the gold standard. Providing these babies with exactly the right nutrients and energy that they need for development is actually quite a challenge. According to Thomas Kühn (Berlin, Germany), that is because it is not enough for babies simply to receive as much energy and protein as possible: this can lead to overweight and encourage both infections and metabolic changes. Studies from France highlight the value of the various components present in human milk: preterm babies that were fed human milk, although unable to meet the usual expectations for growth during their hospital stay, showed a higher level of development at the ages of two years and five years than children that had not been breastfed.

#### **Not all human milk is equal**

Professor Per Torp Sangild (Copenhagen, Denmark) stressed that when evaluating donated human milk with regard to nutrition and the prevention of gastrointestinal disorders, different aspects should be taken into account: the

composition of the milk is subject to variation, depends on the breastfeeding phase and, when the milk is processed at human milk banks to reduce pathogens, undergoes certain changes. For that reason, babies should be given milk from their own mother wherever possible. If that is not achievable, donated milk from a milk bank can be used. However, the heat treatment that the milk usually undergoes for hygiene reasons destroys living cells that are very beneficial for the baby's health, as Professor Josef Neu (Gainesville, USA) explained. For this reason, Dr Susanne Herber-Jonat (Munich, Germany) took an alternative approach to setting up a milk bank: the Munich milk bank uses human milk that has not been subjected to the usual heat treatment. Healthy donors express their milk under the supervision of a lactation consultant and under sterile conditions. The milk produced is then checked – in the same way that conserved blood is checked – and flash-frozen without being heat-treated so that it can be used a later date. This preserves the valuable living cells. But the main objective is to ensure that preterm babies can be taken off donated milk and given their own mother's milk as soon as possible. For that reason, there is still a particular research focus on stimulating milk production in mothers of preterm babies. After all, there is still a lot that we do not know about the composition and effects of this fascinating fluid.