New UCH Breastfeeding Support Group Nourishes New Moms

By Joelle Klein

Jessica Anderson, MSN, CNM, a certified nurse midwife with University of Colorado Hospital’s Center for Midwifery, had always thought the hospital’s Maternal Fetal Medicine program was missing out on an opportunity to help women with breastfeeding support after discharge.

“There was this disconnect when people went home,” she said, noting the excellent inpatient lactation support, prenatal education and information a team of lactation consultants, nurses, physicians and nurse-midwives provided for new moms at the hospital.

But the need for such outpatient nursing support really hit home when Anderson had a baby of her own two years ago. After a challenging course of breastfeeding, Anderson attended a breastfeeding support group at another facility to get the advice and reassurance she needed since there was no such opportunity at UCH.

“When I came back to work, I decided we have to [create a breastfeeding support group] and we have to do it now,” Anderson recalled.

She teamed with breastfeeding and prenatal education counselor Karen Cloud, RN, to devise and implement a plan to get such a group up and running. They made a persuasive case that such a group was needed to support the mothers that delivered at UCH and secured funding and a meeting room.

The hospital’s first Breastfeeding Support Group met in April of 2012 and since then, Cloud estimates, they’ve helped around 150 women. All moms are welcome regardless of where they delivered.

Bringing home the benefits. Many moms know about the benefits of breastfeeding, Anderson said, but because of a variety of issues often give up on it shortly after getting home.

“The American Academy of Pediatrics [APP] recommends that women breastfeed for at least six months because of the many health benefits associated with it, but many moms will stop because they’re worried that they don’t have enough milk to feed their babies,” Cloud explained.

According to the APP, breastfed babies have lower incidences of a variety of diseases and conditions, including type 1 and 2 diabetes, urinary tract infections, leukemia and childhood obesity. Breastfeeding also carries many benefits to the mother, such as decreased postpartum bleeding and a lower risk of breast and ovarian cancers — not to mention the special bonding experience it provides.

The group serves many other purposes for anxious new moms. First and foremost, Cloud and her fellow lactation counselor, Celia Shields, RN, answer questions and offer expert advice to moms with breastfeeding issues and concerns.

Lactation consultant Celia Shields, RN (left), helps new mom Margarita Alarcon at UCH’s free Breastfeeding Support Group.
Some common nursing issues for women include latch and breast milk-pumping problems, concerns that their milk supply will run out or the baby is not getting enough milk, anxiety about returning to work and worry over a frequently fussy baby.

**Safe haven.** “We created this program to give moms a place to come where they can nurse, weigh their babies to make sure they are gaining weight appropriately, get some help, and [gain] reassurance that their babies are doing okay so that they’ll continue to breastfeed,” said Cloud.

“So many people are isolated from extended families, especially military moms, and they don’t have anyone they can connect with and get the reassurance that they need while they’re breastfeeding,” she added.

Six to eight moms and their babies attend most group meetings, as do Cloud and Shields and a volunteer who helps weigh the babies and take information.

However, she had clogging issues between pumping and trying to nurse, followed by more latching difficulties after her son had a procedure to sever his frenulum (a small piece of tissue that connects the underside of the tongue to the floor of the mouth). It was looking like she wasn’t going to reach her goal of nursing for a full year, or even come close to it.

“Every other day I was ready to quit,” said Talavero.

However, she continued to attend the group and get advice and support and, finally, when her son was about two-and-a-half months old, he was nursing like a champ.

“Just having other people there with the same problems helps because you don’t feel like you’re the only one [having them] and there’s something wrong with you,” Talavero said.

She was so impressed by the help she received that she’s planning to start volunteering for the group, while she works toward becoming a certified lactation consultant herself.

“All meetings are free and no registration in necessary. “We make it real easy for them,” said Cloud.

**Worries allayed.** Melissa Talavero started coming to the support group when her son was just a week old. She had nursed her older twin sons, now 14 years old, for 12 weeks but stopped after that because of latching issues. With her new son, she had high hopes of nursing him for at least a year or more. But she soon started having similar latch issues, so Talavero opted to pump and give him a bottle.