Nationally, there’s a steady decline in exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) from birth to six months of age. Studies have shown that breastfed infants have fewer serious illnesses than those who never receive breast milk, including a reduced risk of SIDS and viral infections. Globally only 40% of children under the age of five months are exclusively breastfed.

The barriers to exclusive breastfeeding are numerous. The mother is most vulnerable after hospital discharge when she does not have as much breastfeeding support.

“Breastfeeding is not a one-woman job. Women who choose to breastfeed need support from their governments, health systems, workplaces, communities and families to make it work” UNICEF executive summary

Objectives

Our projects aim was to evaluate our clinic’s BF rate and support BF for infants 0-6 months of age by:

- Documenting feeding method in EMR
- Actively screening for breastfeeding difficulties at well visits from 0-6 months
- Supporting exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age by providing breastfeeding counseling during well visits.
- Addressing maternal concerns about infant feeding
- Referring to certified lactation consultants when appropriate

Background

This project is a multi-site quality improvement project utilizing prospective record review of data collected from well child visits. Outpatient clinics include Middlesex Hospital Family Medicine (MHFM) Residency outpatient clinics in Middletown, Portland, and East Hampton.

Interventions include the following:

- Incorporating an infant feeding template into well child visits up to six months of age to document difficulties
- Providing breastfeeding area and web resources at the first newborn visit and also available in patient rooms
- Patient handouts on breastfeeding benefits, nipple pain, breast pain, pumping and storing, and formula preparation made available
- Breastfeeding toolkit for providers made available

Methods

Feeding preference 0-6 months at Middlesex Residency Clinic

- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Any breast milk
- Any formula

Results

- Rate of Exclusive Breastfeeding By Age
  - CDC 2014 DATA
  - Exclusive BF: 1 month - 60.0%, 2 months - 53.8%, 6 months - 44.4%
- BF continuation rates
  - BF at 6 mo 51%
  - Ever breastfed 83.3%

- Percent of Infants Receiving ANY Breast Milk
  - BF at 6 mo 49.4%
  - Ever breastfed 79.2%

Conclusion

- MHFM EBF rate is similar to the national and Connecticut rates. Although we have a higher EBF rate at 6 months, the percent of babies receiving any breast milk at 6 months is lower than national and CT averages.
- There is a higher rate of EBF in the first 2 weeks of age with the greatest decline in EBF rate occurring between 2 weeks and 1 month.
- The number of breastfeeding challenges reported was very low and of those reported only 27% were referred to a lactation consultant.
- The QI efforts thus far have not improved EBF rate, but we have identified baseline data and time periods when mothers may need more support or education.

Discussion

- This is the first time data has been collected at MHFM to evaluate BF rate and areas for improvement. Our data is comparable to the CDC national and CT data with the exception that our 6 month EBF rate is higher and our overall BF rate is lower at 6 mo.
- The high rate of BF at the first well child visit may be due to Middlesex Hospital’s baby friendly initiative.
- We speculate that improving our reported breastfeeding challenges and referral rate to lactation would help increase BF rates. The referral rate, however, does not account for counseling provided by providers whom are certified lactation consultants.
- NEXT STEPS: Since EBF rate drops precipitously in the first few weeks of life, increased prenatal education and expectations may help increase the breastfeeding rate.
- Evaluating mothers’ reasons for discontinuing BF before 6 months in order to further direct QI initiatives.
- Improving residency breastfeeding education with new breastfeeding curriculum to provide better support to mothers in the well visits.

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