Breastfeeding decisions for Alaska's teen moms: Observations from the professionals' point of view

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Introduction

The state of Alaska recently made headlines by leading the nation in the increase of teen births, rising 19% in one year. In 2009, the birth rate for adolescent mothers in Alaska was 46.8 per 1,000, higher than the national average of 41.5 per 1,000. Historically, adolescent mothers are less likely to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Increasing breastfeeding rates among adolescent mothers is one goal of the Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition. During their 2010 conference, an informal survey was conducted among participants to better understand how lactation consultants and other professionals can support adolescent mothers in Alaska. Ninety-one completed surveys were returned.

Survey design

The first part of the survey consisted of five statements addressing the participant’s experience assisting teen mothers with breastfeeding. Participants were asked to respond to each question using a five point Likert scale. Areas covered included:

- Maternal confidence,
- Influences of family and friends, and
- Professional training.

The second part of the survey asked participants how they liked to receive professional development/educational information. Participants were given a list of five methods of delivery and asked to rank them in order of preference.

Results

Feedback from those who support breastfeeding teens (N=91)

- 81% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that breastfeeding mothers face more obstacles than older mothers.
- 90% agree or strongly agreed that the mother of the teen has influence over infant feeding decisions.
- 30% of participants did not feel well prepared to assist teen mothers with breastfeeding.
- 93% reported that the mother of the teen accompanies the teen to some pediatric and lactation appointments.
- Survey participants preferred to receive educational information in person, followed by web-based delivery and printed materials.

Lessons Learned & Areas for Future Consideration

- Those who support and educate breastfeeding mothers have identified the maternal grandmother as an influence in feeding decisions.
- Providing education specifically aimed at the maternal grandmother during pediatric or lactation appointments may help them better support their breastfeeding teen.
- Many of those who support adolescent mothers do not feel adequately prepared and may benefit from more education that specifically addresses the experience of the breastfeeding teen.