

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Boosting Breastfeeding

Associate Professor Virginia Schmied from the School of Nursing, with Associate Professor Jennifer Fenwick from Curtin University of Technology, and partner investigators Dr Athena Sheehan from Sydney Adventist Hospital, Mrs Anne Saxton from John Hunter Hospital, and Ms Lyn Passant from Campbelltown Hospital, is exploring midwives' interactions with new mothers who are thinking of breastfeeding, through a three year Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project.

'Breastfeeding confers extensive health benefits for infants and women, and is promoted as the optimum method of infant feeding. However, studies indicate that although 80 to 90 percent of women start breastfeeding, approximately 25% stop within the first six weeks,' says Associate Professor Schmied. 'Research also shows that professional support from midwives and lactation consultants can have a positive effect on breastfeeding initiation, but despite an emphasis on professional education, subsequent increases in breastfeeding duration do not occur.'

The research team will conduct interviews with midwives, lactation consultants, and new mothers and will carry out direct observations of interactions between health professionals and women in community and hospital settings. The study will also carry out a detailed review of policy, practice and professional education documentation. Researchers will use discourse analysis (breaking down and re-interpreting the text of written material to find the hidden meanings within them) to look at the impact of midwives and lactation consultants' language and practices, as well as education and public policy on first-time mothers to identify patterns of verbal and non-verbal interactions and behaviours that may



facilitate or inhibit support for breastfeeding women.

This research will inform education and training of health professionals who support breastfeeding mothers in hospitals and the community, with a view to improving the duration of breastfeeding. This will lead to a healthy start to life for more Australian infants, improve long-term health and provide financial benefits to breastfed babies and their families.

Project Title: Establishing Breastfeeding: an analysis of the language and practices used by midwives and lactation consultants when interacting with new mothers

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Contact Details: v.schmied@uws.edu.au, <http://www.uws.edu.au/school/nursing>

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