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Alabama Breastfeeding Committee Offers New Hospital Recognition Program

The Alabama Breastfeeding Committee (ABC) is announcing a new hospital recognition program, encouraging delivering hospitals in Alabama to develop and follow policies that improve maternity care practices, which will increase breastfeeding rates in Alabama. The Better Bama Babies Hospital Recognition Program (BBB) has been developed using evidenced-based recommendations from the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), which is endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

This new recognition program is receiving funding and endorsement through The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and has also been endorsed by the Alabama Department of Public Health, Alabama Medicaid, and the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The recognition program is also supported by the Alabama Chapter of the March of Dimes and the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses.

While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behavior. An extensive body of research has demonstrated that mothers and other caregivers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate breastfeeding practices. WHO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) launched the BFHI in 1992, to strengthen maternity practices that support breastfeeding. The BFHI contributes to improving the establishment of exclusive breastfeeding worldwide

and, coupled with support throughout the healthcare system, can help mothers sustain exclusive breastfeeding.

It is a difficult and costly effort for hospitals to achieve recognition as a BFHI facility. The goal of ABC is to ensure these steps are attainable and to assist with providing positive feedback for these facilities. For some facilities, efforts have halted due to the expense of applying for BFHI recognition. ABC feels strongly that these facilities should receive some recognition for the difficult steps that have been achieved. “It is the hope of our committee that each facility participating in the ABC recognition program will use this process as a stepping stone to ultimately achieve Baby-Friendly status,” says Glenda Dickerson, who serves as the chair of the Hospital Recognition Program. Forty-two other states have adopted similar programs to improve health care for mothers and infants.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and other leading physician groups recommend exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months. According to the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, only 67.6% of babies in AL are ever breastfed compared with 81.1% nationally. Just 10.9% of infants in Alabama are exclusively breastfed for the recommended period of at least six months. Exclusive breastfeeding should be maintained for at least six months and is recommended for up to a year or more to improve the health of the baby.

Volumes of research reveal close associations between breastfeeding and maternal and pediatric health outcomes. As stated in the *U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding* (2011), Dr. Regina Benjamin stated, “Given the

importance of breastfeeding on the health of mothers and children, it is critical that we act to support breastfeeding. Women who choose to breastfeed face numerous barriers—only through the support of family, communities, clinicians, healthcare systems, and employers will we be able to make breastfeeding the easy choice.”

A calculator developed by the Cambridge Health Alliance and funded by the Kellogg Foundation estimates the impact of breastfeeding success on our healthcare system. If Alabama families were able to achieve medically recommended breastfeeding rates the calculator predicts major health improvements and significant cost savings for Alabama.

- For infants, breastfeeding is shown to significantly reduce acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), acute otitis media, Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, gastrointestinal infection, hospitalization for lower respiratory tract infections, obesity in non-Hispanic whites to age four, necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- For moms, breastfeeding reduces rates of costly maternal conditions including breast cancer, premenopausal ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and myocardial infarction.
- Presumably, if 90% of Alabama infants meet recommended breastfeeding durations, the state health system would save approximately \$41,450,000 a year in direct maternal healthcare costs and 45 maternal deaths would be prevented per year. In addition, approximately \$12,000,000 would be saved in direct child healthcare costs.

Breastfeeding is also a great benefit to the environment and society.

Breastfeeding families are sick less often, and the parents miss less work. There is no use of energy for manufacturing or creation of waste or air pollution. Unlike prepared baby formula, there is no risk of contamination, and it is always at the right temperature

and ready to feed.

Components of the hospital recognition program include:

- Educate on the importance of exclusive breastmilk feeding and the rooming in process
- Meet first hour practices of early skin-to-skin care and first feeding
- Teach basic infant feeding management
- Avoid non-medically indicated supplemental feeding and the use of bottle nipples or pacifiers with the breastfeeding baby
- Practice rooming in to allow mothers to spend 23 out of 24 hours a day with their infant and to encourage breastfeeding on cue.
- Provide mom post-discharge education and resources for breastfeeding
- Educate all health care staff on their role in basic breastfeeding management within six months of employment

The ABC is hopeful that the Better Bama Babies program will also help to decrease Alabama's high infant mortality rate. The BBB planning committee chose to include a recognition step to ensure new mothers, and their family, receive education regarding protection from SIDS and sleep-related deaths. Alabama has approximately 120 infants who die each year from being placed for nap or sleep in unsafe sleep conditions. Due to conflicting ideas regarding breastfeeding and bed sharing, the ABC feels that this is a crucial part of the education that should be received by families, prior to discharge.

The Better Bama Babies Hospital Recognition Program is scheduled to begin January 1, 2019. A series of meetings will be scheduled throughout the state to provide education on the program itself and to provide free breastfeeding education to all

hospitals interested in applying for this recognition. More information regarding this program, including the application for recognition, will soon be located on the ABC website at <http://alabamabreastfeeding.org>.

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