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Baby friendly hospital practices in Iran

Yazdanpanahi Z and Zarshenas M
Shiraz University, Iran

Introduction: Breast milk is the optimal source of nutrition for infants and provides health benefits for both mother and baby. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative to improve and support the initiation, duration and exclusively breastfeeding. In Iran 90% of hospitals have received BFHI, however, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding remains below the optimum level. The aim of this study was to evaluate BFHI practices which are summarized in the "Ten steps to successful breastfeeding" in hospitals of Fars provenance of Iran.

Material and Methods: A cross-sectional study was undertaken in Fars-province of Iran that covered 32 private and public BFHI. Mothers, midwives and educational supervisors interviewed face to face by questions that referred to steps 1 to 10 of the BFHI.

Results: All of hospitals observed step 1 (having a written breastfeeding policy), and neonates stayed with mothers for 24 hours a day (step 7). However, almost one-half of mothers (48%) were helped to initiation of breastfeeding (step 5), only 50.3% of mothers reported breastfeeding on demand (step 8), less than 60.3% of health care staff trained on the policy related BFHI (step 2), and only 60.5% of mothers were received information on postpartum resources (step 10). In relation to step 3, 70% of mothers were reported that attend to antenatal class, and one-third (35%) of neonates received pacifier (step 9) and were fed by formula in hospital (step 6).

Conclusion: The findings of this study showed that breastfeeding practices in BFHI of Iran need much work and monitoring to improve exclusive breastfeeding. For instance, breastfeeding should initiate immediately after birth, mothers encourage on demand feeding, and mothers should be supported in postpartum wards and after discharge to continue breastfeeding.

z_yazdanpanahi@yahoo.com

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