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Promotion and Support for Breastfeeding: 1967 - 1999

A summary of action in the UK, Scotland and Glasgow

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1999

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Summary

This paper documents the steps taken since the 1960s to try to increase the prevalence of breastfeeding, in the UK, Scotland and locally, in Glasgow. The table attached summarises the various initiatives and developments over the period.

We make no claim to have included every action but we are fairly sure that we have documented key events. Nor have we reviewed the success of each initiative: a major research undertaking in its own right, rather than part of a short summary such as this.
Introduction

Although breast milk has sustained humans since earliest times, the development of breast milk substitutes and their widespread availability since the Second World War has led to a rapid decline in breastfeeding in the last 50 years. In 1975, for example, only 4% of mothers in England and Wales were fully breastfeeding at 6 weeks. As a result of this decline, described as 'the greatest uncontrolled trial ever to have been done on human beings', government health agencies became concerned in the 1970s about the need to promote breastfeeding, which was agreed to be 'the best food for babies'.

Since this time, breast milk has repeatedly been acknowledged as the optimum food for the developing infant. In addition to its nutritional superiority over artificial breast milk substitutes, research has shown that breast milk protects the infant and the mother from a number of diseases both during the period of breastfeeding and in later life, and encourages optimal growth and development. Other advantages of breastfeeding have also been documented: it may provide economic advantages for the NHS, for employers, for the breastfeeding mother, and it conserves scarce and dwindling natural resources.

From the 1960s there have been attempts to increase the prevalence of breastfeeding, which are documented in this paper. These efforts have increased over the more recent years. However, very little attempt has been made to monitor the impact of these strategies or interventions on breastfeeding rates. The prevalence of breastfeeding remains relatively low in Scotland with particularly low rates in some of the more disadvantaged urban areas.

The UK Perspective

UK government guidance on Breastfeeding: 1974 - 1994

Early 1970s - increasing concern about decline in breastfeeding in the UK, leading to the OPP Working Party set up by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) and publication of Present day practice in infant feeding in 1974. The report recommended that patterns of infant feeding should be continuously reviewed, resulting in a survey and publication Infant Feeding by OPCS (now Office for National Statistics [ONS]) every 5 years from 1975. 1980 was the first year in which Scottish statistics were included.


Recommendations of all three COMA Reports reflect a core of similar concerns - the same ones that preoccupy us today - providing education about breastfeeding in schools, ensuring health service polices and practices encourage breastfeeding, and changing public attitudes to breastfeeding. For example:-

- We think that the mass media could with benefit be used in educating the public about the principles of infant feeding (1974);
- We are concerned that breastfeeding has not yet gained complete social acceptance as the usual way of feeding babies. We urge social, community, educational, commercial and other concerns to take a positive approach to this matter (1988);
- In order to address the cultural and social issues which influence women’s willingness to breastfeed the Health Education Board for Scotland should identify the action required to encourage a more sympathetic attitude by the general public towards breastfeeding (Scottish Diet Action Plan, 1996).

The COMA Working Groups' recommendations applied to many different people, from central Government Departments to individual mothers, formula milk companies to health professionals, and would require concerted effort and political commitment to put into effect.
The Groups’ advice probably did not sit comfortably with the prevailing non-interventionist political climate; whatever the reason, many recommendations were not implemented.

1994 - *Weaning and the weaning diet* - COMA Working Group reiterates importance of breastfeeding and later weaning: ‘breast milk provides the best nourishment during the early months of life’ and ‘the majority of infants should not be given solid food before the age of four months’. 25

**UK Health professionals and voluntary organisations action on breastfeeding: 1967 - 1998**

1967 - Breastfeeding Promotion Group of the National Childbirth Trust formed as a result of concern with quality of breastfeeding support available to mothers. Breastfeeding counsellors trained and free support available to all mothers.

1972 - La Leche League support for breastfeeding mothers begins in UK.

1985 - ‘Difficulties with Breastfeeding: Midwives in Disarray’, a meeting of the Royal Society of Medicine’s Forum on Maternity and the Newborn discussed the lack of research based practice, and the difference between breastfeeding policy and practice in many units. As a result of this meeting a breastfeeding Working Group was set up by the Royal College of Midwives (RCM).

1988 - *Successful Breastfeeding - A practical guide for midwives and others supporting breastfeeding mothers* was published by RCM Breastfeeding Working Group. (Publication was partly funded by the formula companies, ‘in the best tradition of British Industry and the UK baby milk manufacturers’ - Edwina Curry, 1988). 29 The Working Group credits Dr Mavis Gunther, who began publishing articles on breastfeeding in the 1940s, as its guiding light. Unfortunately she was far less influential than Truby-King, whose gospel of four hourly feeds and no feeding at night dominated breastfeeding practice for several decades from the 1920s, and who without doubt was a cause, together with the advent of formula milk, of the decline in breastfeeding. 27


1997 - The Breastfeeding Network founded by former NCT counsellors unhappy with NCT policy on sponsorship by formula milk companies. Breastfeeding Supporters give information and support on breastfeeding.

1998 - UNICEF UK Baby Friendly in the Community Initiative launched - 7 point plan to help establish policies and practices to support breastfeeding in the community.

**England - Department of Health action on breastfeeding: 1988 - 1999**

1988 - Joint Breastfeeding Initiative (JBI) launched at the instigation of the Department of Health, bringing together the voluntary groups, health professionals and Department of Health representatives to increase the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding. A Joint Steering Committee was established and a Co-ordinator appointed. Budget of £60,000 for first 2 years.

1992 - National Breastfeeding Working Group (NBWG) replaced the JBI, with no paid staff.

1995 - *Breastfeeding: Good Practice Guidance to the NHS* published. 29 First national document giving practical guidance to NHS (managers, professionals, support and ancillary staff) on helping women succeed with breastfeeding.

1995 - National Network of Breastfeeding Co-ordinators replaced the NBWG: one Coordinator for each English Health Region with a national chair.
The Scottish Perspective - action on breastfeeding: 1989 - 1999

July 1989 - National Childbirth Trust (NCT) asked to meet with Scottish Office representatives to discuss the establishment of a JBI in Scotland (NCT had been instrumental in getting the JBI going in England). Initially a grant of £3000 was offered to the NCT to set up the Scottish Initiative. After further discussion it was agreed that a national initiative, supported by Scottish Home and Health Department (SHHD) and involving health professionals and lay workers was needed.


1990 - Dundee research on protective effect of breastfeeding against infection published. Methodologically sound and first study to show that protection against infection as a result of breastfeeding important in industrialised countries, not just developing countries. Widely quoted and important boost to pro-breastfeeding lobby.

December 1990 - Scottish Joint Breastfeeding Initiative (SJBI): Inaugural Meeting
- Steering Group established with representatives from professional associations, voluntary organisations, Scottish Health Education Group, SHHD.
- Terms of reference: ‘To undertake a cooperative effort between health professionals and lay breastfeeding counsellors to increase the duration and incidence of breastfeeding by planning and implementing national and local activities:
  1. to improve the care of the breastfeeding mother
  2. to further public education about the value and practice of breastfeeding
  3. to audit breastfeeding practices throughout Scotland’.
- Steering Group’s role to ‘be an advisory group to Health Boards and professional bodies. Representatives on the Steering Group would act as channels of communication with the professional and lay bodies’.

1991 - SJBI Co-ordinator appointed part-time with part-time administrative support to
- Assist an audit of breastfeeding in Scotland
- Liaise between Health Boards and Steering Group
- Develop training materials as appropriate.

Gave advice on setting up new purchaser / provider contracts between Boards and Trusts, taking account of what consumers want, and the need for efficiency. Breastfeeding not included in the list of recommendations or issues which the Management Executive will pursue with Boards.

1993 - The Scottish Diet (James Report) - ‘Evidence is steadily accumulating to show that breast milk has many more advantages than milk formulae and that it is time to change our national strategy on breastfeeding’.


1994 - Scottish Office Management Executive Letter on breastfeeding targets.
Breastfeeding target set: ‘More than 50% of women to be still breastfeeding their babies at 6 weeks of life by 2005’. Health Boards encouraged ‘to set local breastfeeding targets (and milestones) according to their own circumstances, and to address any marked variations in breastfeeding rates throughout their area’. Scottish Office to be advised of ‘proposals for local breastfeeding targets and milestones in line with local circumstances, including variations in rates’ by 31 Jan 1995. SNAP Report (see above) endorsed and commended to purchasers for action.
1994 Scottish Office Letter from Chief Nursing Officer: UK Baby Friendly Initiative. Bringing to CNOs’ attention the UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) ‘an initiative which I consider will help to promote breastfeeding in Scotland’ and enclosing details, also copies of SNAP Report.

1992 - 1995 Achievements of SJBI
- Audit of Infant Feeding in Scotland, 1992 - 5
- Establishment of local JBIs - multi-disciplinary groups with terms of reference similar to those of SJBI
- Publicity and resource materials for annual Breastfeeding Awareness Week
- Liaison with Health Boards (CANOs and CAMOs and obstetric units) - especially concerning breastfeeding policies / practices and staff training
- Newsletter for distribution to / by local JBIs - Network News
- Annual Conferences
- Production of training materials
- Report: Supporting breastfeeding in your Primary Health Care Team produced and distributed throughout Scotland.

1992 - 1995 Problems for SJBI
- No direct representation of Health Boards or Trusts on the Steering Group, so channels of communication indirect and SJBI’s authority unclear.
- Limited resources.

1995 Scottish Breastfeeding Group (SBG) succeeded SJBI.
- Membership as SJBI;
- Remit:
  - Maintain a focus on breastfeeding promotion;
  - Provide a national resource of information and advice for Scotland; liaise with HEBS in relation to public awareness;
  - Promote a multidisciplinary approach by encouraging the involvement of all health professionals.

1995 National Breastfeeding Adviser (formerly SJBI Co-ordinator) appointed to:
- Assist towards the achievement of breastfeeding target announced in November 1994;
- Provide advice, training resources and support to NHS personnel and lay workers;
- Act as a facilitator to local JBIs;
- Report and make recommendations to SBG.

1996 - Eating for Health - A Diet Action Plan for Scotland. Summarised progress to date with breastfeeding promotion and support and recommended a ‘multi-faceted approach’ to encouraging breastfeeding. Action points:
- Education about positive benefits of breastfeeding in schools;
- Scottish hospitals to pursue the Baby Friendly Initiative;
- HEBS to ‘identify the action required to encourage a more sympathetic attitude by the general public towards breastfeeding’.

1996 - 2nd Scottish Officer letter from Chief Nursing Officer on BFI.

The Glasgow Perspective

1992 - Guthrie card data first used to monitor breastfeeding rates. This highlighted the low breastfeeding rates in Glasgow particularly in areas of socio-economic deprivation and resulted in the consideration of a Greater Glasgow Health Board (GGHB) breastfeeding promotion strategy.
The Glasgow Joint Breastfeeding Initiative (GJBI): 1993 on

A multidisciplinary group, formally constituted in February 1993. Prior to this it had met informally and could be noted as the first collaboration of lay and professional organisations that aimed to do something about breastfeeding in Glasgow.

Aims
- Improve the care and support to breastfeeding mothers
- To educate about the values and practice of breastfeeding
- To improve facilities for breastfeeding mothers.

In practice
- The Aims have been achieved to some extent by producing leaflets and information packs, and providing breastfeeding resources such as videos, leaflets, books etc. A number of seminars, workshops, conferences, presentations and study days for lay people and health professionals have been organised. In this way the GJBI acts as a breastfeeding information resource for lay people, health professionals and undergraduate and postgraduate students. Hospitals, health centres, workplaces, travel centres etc have been lobbied in an attempt to provide better facilities for breastfeeding mothers.
- The effectiveness of the GJBI has not been formally evaluated. However it is likely that it proves valuable as a source of support and information for those attending the meetings / receiving minutes and feedback from conferences training events suggested that it has provided valuable information and raised awareness about breastfeeding.

Problems
- Group members have good practical breastfeeding knowledge but lack the clout and expertise necessary for promoting breastfeeding across the City;
- Limited funding;
- Reliance on members to do GJBI work in their own time limits the level of activity;
- Geographically, Glasgow has 5 Trusts with differing interests and priorities that could not easily be encompassed by this one group.
- Once the Trusts were formed staff members reported reduced flexibility making it difficult to attend meetings.

Greater Glasgow Health Board action on breastfeeding: 1993 - 1995

1993 - "Breastfeeding Initiative for Greater Glasgow", the GGHB’s breastfeeding promotion strategy. Drafted by Director of Public Health, outlined the advantages of breastfeeding, the association between breastfeeding and social circumstances, the role of the health professional and the need to promote breastfeeding. Recommended the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation Group for Breastfeeding.

Identified three main topics for action:
- Breastfeeding Training Workshops;
- Breastfeeding Policy;
- Pilot Breastfeeding Promotion Project involving peer education.

Produced a costed proposal which was passed by the GGHB Finance Committee, 6/93.

1993 - 1995 The Monitoring and Evaluation Group for Breastfeeding was formalised and called the GGHB Breastfeeding Initiative Group. The group aimed to take forward the three topics by ensuring workshops were cascaded to every midwife in GGHB, evaluating the impact of the Policy, ensuring current recommendations were implemented and revising the policy if necessary and finally evaluating the promotion project.
In practice

- Breastfeeding Workshops were cascaded to all midwives within GGHB. Data were collected on the effectiveness of the workshops but concerns were expressed regarding the validity of data which were collected by the midwives who were assisting the mothers to breastfeed, data were incomplete and results were not published.
- Breastfeeding Policy was re-written and distributed to all Health Board premises. No data were collected as to whether current recommendations were being implemented nor on the effectiveness or impact of new policy.
- Breastfeeding Promotion Project took place - see below.

Evaluation

- Members of this group had a lot of individual influence but most lacked practical breastfeeding knowledge.
- The Group lacked direction and there may have been some overlap of role with the GJBI group.
- Later the formation of Trusts meant that the GGHB had less direct control over what was implemented in hospitals.

The group disbanded in 1995 and handed responsibility for breastfeeding issues to the Maternity Services Liaison Committee.

Other action in Glasgow: 1993 on

1993 - 1997 - The Glasgow Infant Feeding Action Research Project (GIFRP): an evaluation of peer support for breastfeeding. This large controlled trial in a socio-economically disadvantaged area (Easterhouse) was a direct result of the GGHB Breastfeeding Initiative Group and was jointly funded by the University of Glasgow and GGHB.37

1994 - Pollok Project: this project involved training of local health visitors using Jenny Warren's BEST breastfeeding course. The health visitors subsequently devised a Standard for Breastfeeding Practice which included a visit all breastfeeding mothers every week for at least four weeks, and collecting data to audit the effectiveness of their practice. The Pollok Support Group was set up providing peer support and was later constituted as the "Pollok Breastfeeding Mums' Club". The mothers provide support to each other and may visit new mothers at home to give encouragement about breastfeeding.

1994 - the Glasgow Infant Feeding Audit (GIFA) funded by the GGHB Area Clinical Audit Committee. Data collected on infant feeding intention and behaviour from women booking in two sample months (November 1995 and May 1996).

1996 - Breastfeeding Promotion Nurse employed at the Cairns Medical Practice, Shettleston.

1996 - Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFI) - Certificates of Commitment awarded in 1996 to Rutherglen Maternity Hospital and in 1997 to the Queen Mother's Hospital.

1996 - Springfield Medical Practice, Bishopbriggs audited breastfeeding, recruited a health visitor with a particular interest in breastfeeding and set up a support group.

1997 - Locality Purchasing Breastfeeding Initiative began. This was based on the peer support programme running in Easterhouse and involved six areas of Glasgow (Easterhouse, Bridgeton, Townhead, Parkhead, Gorbals and Govanhill). Mothers stating an intention to breastfeed or who are undecided are provided with a peer supporter who provides breastfeeding information and support.

1997 - Women Talking - about Breastfeeding. Part of a series of mini-mags on women's health produced by GGHB Health Promotion Department, this one featured breastfeeding.

1997 - Glasgow Infant Feeding Audit (GIFA) report.20


1998 - Lactation Management Training provided to multidisciplinary staff groups at Queen Mother’s Hospital as part of the Baby Friendly Initiative.

1998 - Queen Mother’s Hospital assessed for Baby Friendly Status by accreditation team.

1999 - Breastfeeding support groups continue to increase in Glasgow with approximately 26 groups functioning.


Conclusion

The effectiveness of initiatives to increase breastfeeding documented in this paper is largely unevaluated. The continuing low rates of breastfeeding in Scotland suggest that initiatives to promote and support breastfeeding to date have had limited effect. For example, Infant Feeding reports show that although there was little change in the proportion of babies who were breastfed initially in Scotland between 1980 and 1990, between 1990 and 1995 there was a statistically significant increase, from 50% to 55%. However, it is important to place the results in the context of changes in the composition of the sample over this period...In Scotland standardising for the age and educational level of mothers...removed much of the observed increase in breastfeeding since 1990, and reduced 1995 rates to the same level as in 1985.  

In other words, breastfeeding may be increasing, but only because mothers are generally older and better educated than they were, not because breastfeeding has become more popular amongst younger and less affluent women.

The PEACH Unit is evaluating new initiatives to promote and support breastfeeding so that effective strategies can be identified and put into effect.

Copies of this paper are available on disk from the PEACH Unit.


14 Broadfoot M. Economic consequences of breastfeeding for less than 3 months. *New Generation Digest* 1995;December:5.


### Summary Table: Promotion and Support for Breastfeeding: 1967 - 1999

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>NCT Breastfeeding Promotion Group set up.</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>Royal Society of Medicine Meeting: 'Difficulties with Breastfeeding: Midwives in Disarray - highlights lack of research based practice and gap between policy and practice. Leads to Working Group set up by RCM and publication of:</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Successful Breastfeeding - A practical guide for midwives and others supporting breastfeeding. Copies distributed to all midwives.</td>
<td>Joint Breastfeeding Initiative launched. Brings together health professionals, voluntary groups and Dept of Health reps to increase prevalence and duration of breastfeeding. Paid Co-ordinator and £60,000 budget for 1st 2 years.</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>3rd COMA Working Party Report. First concern with ‘marked social class gradient in prevalence of breastfeeding’, other recommendations similar to previous years.</td>
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<td>Protective effect of breastfeeding against infection - methodologically sound research from Dundee shows protection from infection thro’ bf important in Scotland, not just 3rd world.</td>
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<td>1990</td>
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<td>Scottish Joint Breastfeeding Initiative inaugural meeting.</td>
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<td>SJBI Co-ordinator appointed.</td>
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<td>15 Local JBIs active</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>1st Baby Friendly award to UK Maternity Hospital.</td>
<td>Supporting Breastfeeding in your Primary Health Care Team published by SJBI. SJBI Infant Feeding Audit ends.</td>
<td>GGHB Breastfeeding Initiative Group disbanded - breastfeeding issues to be handled by MSLC.</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Breastfeeding: Good Practice Guidance to the NHS. First national document giving practical guidance on helping women succeed with breastfeeding.</td>
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