Dilemma of Breastmilk Feeding

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WABA GBPF, Penang, October 2010
Definitions

- **Breastfeeding**: nurturing the baby directly at the breast
- **Breastmilk feeding**: feeding expressed milk to a baby, usually by bottle
- **Normalisation**: treating an intervention as similar or equal to what is normal
Breastmilk feeding
Pitfalls

When something with a use in relatively few circumstances is normalised, there are

- Personal, family, industrial-relations, and women’s rights implications
- The intervention is presented as a life “choice”
A changed focus

- Breastmilk feeding leads to a changed focus
- Mothers refocus on millilitres, not infant cues
- Babies are invariably bottle-fed
- Mothers worry about volume and lose confidence, and turn to expressing or pumping to “prove” their breasts’ capacity.
How else do mothers and babies lose?

- Mother and baby are separated
- The unique supply-demand balance that comes with natural breastfeeding is interfered with
- Mother and baby miss some of their skin-skin-contact
- Mother has the chore of hygienic care of feeding vessel, expressing, storing her milk
Father’s rights – a skewed view

According to bottle advertising,
- Mothers who don’t express or pump their milk for others to feed, deny fathers
  - a bonding experience
  - a “right”

(This totally ignores better ways of providing skin-to-skin contact.)
Implications
Who are the losers?

- The MOTHER - more work created
- The BABY – separation, suck confusion, supply compromised (if artificial milk is used, instead of expressing)
- The FATHER - misses out on better ways of interacting with the baby, more conducive to bonding
And so to breast pumps, to facilitate breastmilk feeding

- Various types were devised to augment hand-expressing, or as an alternative, especially for long-term expressing
  - This is surely good, not negative?
  - BUT marketing has got in the way
  - What was useful in specific cases became normalised for anyone
Pumping normalised

- Described as “natural”
- Marketed as a breastfeeding “need”
- Feeding expressed milk (breastmilk feeding) = breastfeeding
- A pump now believed “essential” to breastfeed (some countries)
- Sales and hire became lucrative
Task focused, not baby focused
(even the book is for learning)

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But babies are still getting human milk, aren’t they?

- Yes, and for some mother-baby pairs this expressing and feeding the milk may be the only way
- BUT is the actual breast pump so essential?
- Let’s look at pitfalls
Industrial relations: Pitfalls of pump promotion

A vanishing interest in improving industrial provisions for breastfeeding women, i.e.
- workplace creches
- breastfeeding breaks
- Clauses in industrial agreements
Industrial relations
Follow-on effects of pump mentality

- Even breastfeeding advocates are completely satisfied with pumping facilities – and,
- indeed, may ask only for these
- **A win** to the “bottom line” of pump companies & bottle/teat companies
- **A loss** to mothers and babies
New, limited provisions for paid BF breaks, 2 Australian states

- New South Wales and Queensland
- Applies to Public Servants, only
- The breaks are in work time and mothers don’t lose pay (just as smokers don’t lose pay)
- Statements to the media confuse breastfeeding and breastmilk feeding – but leave this open
Women’s rights

- Whether in the workplace or at home,
- the promotion of breastmilk feeding and pumping
- limits women’s choices (despite perception of more choice)
Dependence on technology (1)

- Equipment is sometimes faulty
  - BUT women blame their bodies, not the machine (which costs money)
- Equipment sometimes breaks
Dependence on technology (2)

- Loss of the skill of hand-expressing in the community
- Not well taught (if at all)
- Maternity staff may encourage pump use, instead (and may change mother’s preference)
- Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, teaching hand expression
Dependence on technology (3)

Highly marketed, expensive pumps require electric power
Useless during
- power blackouts,
- disasters
Expense to mothers

- Women may not be able to afford the “necessary” pump, espec a hospital-grade, electric one
- Effective manual pumps are overpriced in Western countries
- If mothers obtain a pump, this is money that takes food off the table
Dependence on breastpump ads, sales and hiring for income – the dilemma

Breastfeeding organisations

- chase “ethical” advertising revenue, sponsorships, and income
- refuse money from manufacturers of items within the scope of the WHO Code of Marketing
- BUT promoting pumps leads to bottle-feeding, even if it is EBM
Points for discussion

- Breastmilk feeding has a place, but is becoming a life “choice”
- Marketing promotes pumps and thus breastmilk feeding → bottles
- Breast pumps aren’t essential
- They are a substitute for (no cost) hand expression
- Focus on pumps → no workplace provisions for breastfeeding