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EPI

Judging Dept.

Ravi Pothireddy

Student

M.P.H./Dr.P.H

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Dr. Mary Applegate

Dept or Program Years in program

Mentor

Breastfeeding Rates and Hospital Practices in New York state, 2002 Survey Analysis.

Author (s)

Ravi Pothireddy

Background: New York state hospital regulations require policies and practices that support breastfeeding. Surveys conducted by NYSDOH in 1995 and 1998 showed that supportive hospital practices correlated positively with breastfeeding initiation rates.

Objective: Survey data from 2002 were analyzed to assess whether the hospital practices correlated with exclusive breastfeeding rates looking both at aggregate practices and at selected individual practices.

Methods: All New York state hospitals with maternity services were surveyed using two questionnaires, one that assessed breastfeeding policies and practices and another that assessed breastfeeding incidence. The Best practices score was calculated by counting the number of pro-breastfeeding practices at each hospital. Correlation between breastfeeding rates and practices were analyzed using SAS regression procedures.

Results: The survey was completed by 122 hospitals (76%). Hospital specific breastfeeding rates ranged from 29.2% to 95.5%. The Best practices score ranged from 10 to 25. Simple linear regression showed that the exclusive breastfeeding rates correlated positively with the overall Best practices score. Multiple linear regression including each element of Best practices score gave an R-square of 0.33 for the full model. In addition, two of the individual elements in the model were independently significant: avoidance of anti-lactation drugs, presence of a certified lactation consultant as the hospital's lactation coordinator.

Conclusion: Breastfeeding policies and practices are effective in increasing breastfeeding rates. Hospitals should implement all of these policies and practices to achieve the "Healthy people 2010" goal of 75% breastfeeding in early postpartum.