PS#89 – Pediatricians’ Attitudes and Practices Regarding the Feeding Practices of Healthy Full-term Infants

PS#89 was sponsored for the Periodic Survey by the AAP Section on Breastfeeding (SOBr) and funding for the survey was provided through the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, Cooperative Agreement #UC4MC21534. Questions addressed pediatricians’ current recommendations for infant feeding practices, breastfeeding counseling and management, and opinions related to infant feeding practices. Many of the questions on PS#89 replicated or adapted questions from Periodic Survey #57, 2004; findings are compared across survey years.

PS#89 was an 8-page self-administered questionnaire sent to 1627 nonretired U.S. members of the AAP from July 23 to December 31, 2014; response to the survey was 52%. PS#57 (2004) was sent to 1640 nonretired U.S. members of the AAP from November 1, 2003 to May 21, 2004; response to the survey was 53%. Analysis was limited to those pediatricians who provide primary care to children from birth to 2 years of age: 620 pediatricians in 2014 (74.2% of all respondents) and 675 pediatricians in 2004 (77.1% of all respondents).

Findings:

Infant Feeding Counseling/Recommendations

- About three-fourths of pediatricians in both survey years recommend breastfeeding exclusively for the first month of life (76% in 2014 vs 74% in 2004).
- Overall, fewer pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 recommend exclusive breastfeeding for a specified amount of time: 5% vs 8% recommend exclusive breastfeeding for 1-2 months, 25% vs 33% recommend breastfeeding for 4 months, 40% vs 37% recommend doing so for 6 months, and 11% vs 12% for 1 year; more pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 recommend continuing exclusive breastfeeding as long as mutually desired by mother and baby (16% vs 8%) (p<.001).
- More pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 recommend continuing any breastfeeding (other than exclusive) for as long as it is mutually desired by mother and baby (56% in 2014 vs 41% in 2004, p<.001).
- Pediatricians’ definition of exclusive breastfeeding differs somewhat across survey years. In 2014, 85% of pediatricians define exclusive breastfeeding as no food or drink other than breastmilk, vitamins, iron or medications; in 2004 71% defined exclusive breastfeeding in this way. (p<.001).
- The proportion of pediatricians recommending breastfeeding for full-term infants under the following circumstances has increased across survey years: an otherwise healthy infant jaundiced at 2 weeks (97% of pediatricians report recommending breastfeeding to mothers of these infants in 2014 vs 92% in 2004), mother expresses inconvenience/time demands of breastfeeding (93% vs 85%), mother’s milk supply seems inadequate (88% vs 76%), mother is too young or immature (89% vs 74%), and mother abuses illicit drugs (14% vs 10%) (all p<.05).
- More pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 “routinely” recommend iron supplements (24% vs 18%, p<.01) and vitamin D (91% vs 51%, p<.001) before 6 months of age for exclusively breastfeeding infants.
- In 2014, when asked at what age solid foods should be introduced for exclusively breastfeeding infants, 70% of pediatricians recommend introducing solid foods at 6 months of age and 23% recommend introducing solid foods at 4 months of age.
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Breastfeeding Management

- The proportion of pediatricians who report having lactation consultants who are responsible for answering general telephone questions or other communications regarding breastfeeding in their main practice has increased across survey years: 27% in 2014 compared to 19% in 2004, p<.01.
- The proportion of pediatricians who say they refer to or provide lactation consultants has increased across survey years: 90% in 2014 vs. 86% in 2004, p<.05.
- Asked in 2014 only, 77% of pediatricians say they provide all or most of the counseling on breastfeeding during office visits; 22% say lactation consultants provide all or most of the counseling.
- More pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 report they frequently (≥5 times/year) counseled on lactation problems (74% vs 56%), considered cultural beliefs/treatments before planning to observe and evaluate breastfeeding (53% vs 26%), taught a new mother breastfeeding techniques (55% vs 37%), asked about herbal supplements (49% vs 22%), and taught a breastfeeding mother how to use a breast pump (24% vs 7%) (all p<.001).
- Asked in 2014 only, only 7% of pediatricians say their main office displays advertisements for formula; however, 67% say their main office distributes free infant formula or formula supplies.

Attitudes toward and Confidence in Breastfeeding Counseling

- Fewer pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 agree that breastfeeding and formula-feeding are equally acceptable methods for feeding infants (40% vs 45%, p<.05).
- A majority of pediatricians in both survey years are confident that they can competently manage common breastfeeding problems (83% in 2014, 79% in 2004); however, slightly more in 2014 say they are confident in their ability to adequately address parents’ questions about breastfeeding (91% vs 86%, p<.01).

Education on Breastfeeding

- Fewer pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 say they have read any articles in medical journals or books on the management of breastfeeding during the past three years (81% vs 88%, p<.01); only 4 out 10 pediatricians in both survey years say they have attended any CME or Grand Rounds programs on the management of breastfeeding during the past three years (42%, 43%).
- About three-fourths of pediatricians in both survey years (76% in 2014 and 80% in 2004) say they would be interested in receiving further education that focuses on the management of breastfeeding.
- Asked in 2014 only, 17% of pediatricians say they have completed the 3-hour Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding education course.

Personal Experience with Breastfeeding

- More pediatricians in 2014 than in 2004 report they breastfed exclusively 1 or more of their children for 6 months: 49% vs 36%, p<.05.
- Asked only in 2014, more than 80% of pediatricians say having breastfeeding experience (either themselves or their partner) affects their interaction with breastfeeding mothers in their practice.

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