EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Periodic Survey #57 –

PEDIATRICIANS’ ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES REGARDING BREASTFEEDING, 1995 v 2004

The 2004 survey (PS#57) was initiated by the Section on Breastfeeding as a follow up to a 1995 survey (PS#30) assessing pediatricians’ practices regarding counseling on breastfeeding and attitudes surrounding breastfeeding management and education.

Periodic Survey #57 was an eight-page self-administered questionnaire sent to 1,640 active (non-retired) United States members of the AAP. An original mailing and five follow-up mailings to recontact nonrespondents were conducted from November 2003 through May 2004; 675 questionnaires were received for a response rate of 53%. PS#30 was mailed to 1,602 members from July 1995 to November 1995; 1132 questionnaires were received for a response rate of 71%. On both surveys, analysis of items addressing breastfeeding counseling is based on respondents who provide primary care to children from birth to 2 years of age: 675 pediatricians in 2004 (77% of all respondents) and 832 pediatricians in 1995 (74% of all respondents). All respondents were eligible to respond to questions on hospital breastfeeding policies.

Counseling on Breastfeeding:

- In 2004, compared to 1995, more pediatricians report that all or most of the full-term infants in their practice were breastfeeding (either exclusively or with formula supplements) when discharged from the hospital (68% v 57%, p<.001) and at the time of the first postnatal visit (63% v 53%, p<.001).

- Although few pediatricians in either year report all or most patients breastfeeding at 6 months of age, the percentage so reporting in 2004 was significantly greater than in 1995 (13% v 7%, p<.001).

- In 2004, 25% of pediatricians report some one-year-old patients were breastfeeding, compared to only 16% in 1995 (p<.001), while almost no pediatricians in either year said 2-year olds in their practice were breastfeeding.

- About two-thirds of pediatricians (65%) define “exclusive” breastfeeding as having no food or drink other than breastmilk, vitamins, iron or medications. When discussing feeding options with parents of healthy full-term infants in their practice, significantly more pediatricians in 2004 than in 1995 say they recommend breastfeeding exclusively for the first month of life (74% v 65%, p<001).

- In both 2004 and 1995 the most commonly named reasons for not recommending breastfeeding is if mother is HIV infected or abuses drugs (97% v 91%, p<.001) and if mothers’ medications are harmful to the infant (96% v 90%, p<.001).

Breastfeeding Recommendations:

- In 2004, 33% of pediatricians recommend mothers continue exclusive breastfeeding for 4 months and 37% recommend they continue for 6 months. When asked about supplemental breastfeeding, 43% of pediatricians recommend mothers continue for one year and 31% encourage mothers to continue any breastfeeding as long as they want.

- In 2004, 67% of pediatricians recommend breastfeeding be initiated within 1 hour after delivery compared to 44% of pediatricians in 1995 (p<.001).

- In 2004, 68% of pediatricians recommend that during the first month of life an infant be breastfed whenever the baby seems hungry or fussy (ie, on demand), approximately 8 to 12 times per day, and 23% recommend every 3 hours. In 1995, 59% recommended infants be put to the breast whenever the baby seems hungry or fussy (ie, on demand) and 31% said they should be fed 8 to 12 times per day (“every 3 hours” was not an answer option in 1995).
The proportion of pediatricians who recommend no supplementation (ie, offering no water or formula) to the breastfeeding infant in their initial hospital orders increased from 79% in 1995 to 88% 2004 (p<.001).

Breastfeeding Management:

- In 2004, compared to 1995, more pediatricians provided or referred mothers to a lactation consultant (86% v 74%, p<.001), a hospital-based lactation center (75% v 58%, p<.001) and/or breastfeeding equipment or supplies (77% v 68%, p<.01).
- In 2004, compared to 1995, more pediatricians who have completed their residency training report having had education on the management of breastfeeding during medical school or residency (63% v 52%, p<.001). In both survey years, most post-residency pediatricians say they are interested in receiving further education on breastfeeding, however, interest has dropped a bit since 1995 (79% in 2004 v 85% in 1995, p<.01).
- About 8 out of 10 post-residency pediatricians in both survey years report feeling confident in their ability to manage common breastfeeding problems (85% in 2004 v 80% in 1995, ns).

Opinions on Breastfeeding:

- In 2004, compared to 1995, pediatricians are less likely to think the benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any difficulties/inconveniences (58% v 68%, p<.001); however, they are also less likely to say formula fed infants are just as healthy as breastfed ones (26% v 35%, p<.001). In 2004, respondents are more likely to think pediatricians have influence on whether mothers initiate breastfeeding (80% v 69%, p<.001) and to believe mothers should continue breastfeeding after returning to work (96% v 93%, p<.05).

Hospital Policies Regarding Breastfeeding:

- In 2004, less than one-half of pediatricians know if the main hospital with which they are affiliated has a written policy regarding breastfeeding; this represents a decrease from those reporting in 1995 (47% v 54%, p<.001).

Personal Experiences with Breastfeeding:

- Nearly equal proportions of pediatricians in both survey years have children: 69% in 2004 and 72% in 1995. The average number of children per pediatrician is 2.4 in both survey years.
- The proportion of pediatricians reporting one or more of their children who were exclusively breastfed has significantly increased from 37% in 1995 to 72% in 2004 (p<.001).