

Summary of Roundtable Discussion on Designing a Course on Lactation Management, Breastfeeding and Milk Banking

Date: 6 January 2024 (Online)

Time: 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

The roundtable discussion brought together an esteemed group of academicians, medical professionals, entrepreneurs, and policymakers for a critical roundtable discussion. This gathering aimed to leverage collective expertise in shaping a forward-looking curriculum course in Lactation Management, Breastfeeding, and Maternal Health, tailored to India's unique context.

Purpose of the Round Table:

The primary purpose of this round table discussion is to collectively explore and assess the feasibility and potential benefits of introducing a comprehensive course in Lactation at Rishihood University in collaboration with Sushena Health Foundation.

Panelists

Dr Santhosh Kumar Kraleti, Associate Dean, School of Healthcare, Rishihood University

Dr Gunjan Rajput, Deputy Registrar, Rishihood University

Dr Mangala Bharthi. S, Professor & Head, Department of Neonatology, Madras Medical College, Chennai, Tamil Nādu

Dr Kanya Mukhopadhyay, Professor, Neonatology, PGIMER, Chandigarh

Dr. Satish Tiwari, - Professor, Pediatrics, Amravati, Founder President, Indian Medico-Legal & Ethics Association

Dr. K Karthikeyan, Professor, Pediatrics, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute, Pondicherry

Dr Sridhar Ryavanki, Health Specialist UNICEF Field Office Hyderabad

Dr S Sitaraman, Professor, Pediatrics, J K Lon Hospital

Dr Kesavulu, Retd. Civil Surgeon Pediatrician, CCC Member –BPNI

Poonam Nehra, Assistant Professor, Rishihood University

Exploring the Need for a Lactation Education Program:

- It was recognized that while India has a high rate of institutional deliveries, there is a significant gap in early initiation of breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding.
- There is a need for a course that would provide hands-on and on-the-ground experience.
- The need for a robust curriculum and experienced faculty members was emphasized.

Summary:

The meeting brought together various perspectives on lactation education, with participants emphasizing the need for collaboration between civil society and academia. Rishihood University, recognized for its impact-oriented approach, aims to produce graduates capable of influencing society and global healthcare. Dr. Santhosh Kumar Kraleti highlighted Rishihood's commitment to education beyond job creation, focusing on low-cost, high-impact courses like lactation and breastfeeding. The School of Healthcare aims for increased accessibility, equality, and excellence in public health. Poonam Nehra defined the landscape of lactation education in India and globally. Dr. Gunjan Rajput discussed the credit system, proposing degree, diploma, and certificate programs, aligning with regulatory aspects, market demand, and the National Education Policy. In the discussions led by Dr. Kanya Mukhopadhyay, the focus was primarily on short lactation courses, acknowledging the practical constraints of individuals. Dr. Satish Tiwari proposed a comprehensive course covering nutrition, maternal and child nutrition, milk banking, and lactation, with considerations for varying durations based on participants' backgrounds. Dr. S Sitaraman suggested breaking down lactation courses into three or four parts, emphasizing starting with simple lactation management centers before milk banks. Dr. Mangala Bharthi. S raised concerns about the focus on duration and suggested a unique course addressing multiple domains. Dr. Kesavulu highlighted the need for a large number of counselors and self-employment opportunities. Dr. Sridhar Ryavanki discussed challenges in creating new human resources, aligning courses with government guidelines, and assessing market demand. Dr. K Karthikeyan shared experiences in conducting a 3-month certificate course and emphasized the importance of affordability and practical sessions.

Inputs from the Panelists:

Dr Santhosh Kumar Kraleti

- Emphasis on Rishihood's commitment to education that goes beyond job creation, aiming for broader social transformation.
- The School of Healthcare aligns with this vision, focusing on courses with low cost, high impact, increased accessibility, equality, and excellence in public health.
- Prioritizing courses such as lactation and breastfeeding, considering them as vital interventions, more impactful than traditional vaccines.
- Distinction between public health-focused courses and traditional hospital-centric, resource-driven programs.
- Intention to work on gatekeeping mechanisms and preventive health measures, following models like the UK's NHS.
- The desire to improve health practices, positive health, and wellness rather than solely focusing on treating diseases.
- Acknowledgment of the expertise of Dean Professor Dr Anil Kaul, who has extensive global experience, including conflict zones like Iraq and Syria.
- Expressing concern over the stagnation in breastfeeding rates despite institutional deliveries being prevalent.
- The aim to establish an army of lactation counselors and consultants to drive positive change in breastfeeding practices.
- The proposal to collaborate with organizations like BPNI and IYCF to create a certificate course with job prospects for students in physiotherapy, nutrition, and allied fields.
- The goal is to achieve a win-win situation, benefitting students, educational institutions, and contributing to the improvement of breastfeeding rates in the country.

Poonam Nehra

- Definition of lactation professionals as interdisciplinary advocates, experts, and collaborators in healthcare settings.
- Core knowledge and skills required for lactation professionals, including pediatric, public health, teaching, pregnancy, labor, postpartum nutrition, physical examination, anatomy,

physiology, pharmacology, legal frameworks, social and family dynamics, and counseling skills.

- Target audience for lactation education, including pediatricians, public health professionals, labor nurses, midwives, OB-GYNs, nutritionists, physiotherapists, speech language therapists, surgeons, social workers, and mental health professionals.
- Three designations in the field: Certified Lactation Educators, Certified Lactation Counselors, and International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC), with IBCLC being the highest credential.
- Prerequisites for IBCLC, including a Health Science degree, exposure, lactation-specific education, counseling-specific education, and clinical experience.
- Globally available courses on lactation, both university programs and online options, with examples such as the University of California, San Diego extension, lactation consultant training program, Lactation Education Resources, Breastfeeding Outlook, Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice, and Gold Learning.
- Accredited institutes in the USA for Allied health professionals, including Columbus State for Milk Bank Technician Certificate program and the Hospital Curriculum by Baby Friendly USA.
- Indian scenario: Lactation education is relatively unregulated, with few recognized programs like Hinduja Hospital, BPNI, Begin Ed India, Swayam App, Public Health Foundation of India, and the different programs offered by Begin Ed India with varying hours and costs.
- The need for input on how Rishihood University can initiate similar courses in lactation.

Dr Gunjan Rajput

- Emphasis on considering regulatory aspects and market demand when designing programs.
- Discussion on offering programs in three categories: Degree, Diploma, and Certificate.
- For a degree, completion of 120 credits required, with a focus on mapping assessments efficiently.
- Diploma requires 40 credits, while certificates are more flexible in terms of duration and structure.
- Overview of programs offered at Rishihood University in BSc, BBA, and postgraduate diploma in Public Leadership.

- Mention of various certificate programs in public policy and governance.
- Explanation of the credit system, with a breakdown of credits for different types of programs and exit points for students.
- Discussion on the flexibility of exit options, allowing students to obtain a certificate, diploma, or degree at different stages of their academic journey.
- Proposal for designing courses with break-up models, providing options for delegates to earn credits and exit with a certificate.
- Acknowledgment of the importance of the National Education Policy (NEP) in course design considerations.
- Invitation to the team for further discussion on curriculum design and fitting it into the designated categories.

Dr Kanya Mukhopadhyay

- Emphasis on focusing more on short lactation courses.
- Duration considerations due to practical constraints; people may not have time for longer courses.
- Mention updated government guidelines (CLMC) that include requirements for hands-on training.
- Proposal to integrate BPNI course with milk banking course for a robust program.
- Acknowledgment of the importance of shorter duration courses as many individuals seek training for 7-15 days.
- Recognition of the need for a practical, hands-on approach in the curriculum, focusing on encouraging people to start milk banks.
- Identification of the target participants as lactation counselors, nursing officers, and doctors for the small course.
- Suggestions to decide on the fee structure, type of certificate, and duration of the small course, aiming for a one-month contact program.
- Acknowledgment of the demand for shorter training from those trying to start milk banks without the time for a more extensive course.

- Mention individuals asking to visit units, observe, and start their milk banks, highlighting the need for practical training.
- Input on the need for a smaller duration course to assist units in starting their milk banks and addressing the inquiries received.

Dr. Satish Tiwari

- Proposal to have a comprehensive course covering nutrition, maternal and child nutrition, milk banking, and lactation, followed by specializations or super specializations.
- Discussion on the duration based on participants' backgrounds, suggesting a longer duration for those without medical backgrounds.
- Uncertainty about government regulations and UGC approval for shorter courses, highlighting the need for compliance with established standards.
- Reference to a practical example of conflicting guidelines on minimum area requirements for establishing a milk bank, illustrating the challenges of adhering to international standards.
- Agreement on the need for a full course for motivated individuals, especially those from non-medical backgrounds, to gain basic and practical knowledge.
- Acknowledgment of the importance of building confidence in lactation counselors and the role they can play in improving breastfeeding statistics and addressing malnutrition.
- Emphasis on women and family empowerment as crucial elements in achieving positive health outcomes and overcoming challenges posed by media influence.
- Personal belief that doctors alone may not effectively manage issues related to malnutrition, junk food, and breastfeeding, advocating for the role of lactation counselors.
- Suggestion to tailor shorter duration courses for qualified individuals with a medical background and longer courses for those without medical backgrounds, subject to approval from policymakers, government, and UGC.

Dr S Sitaraman

- Breakdown the proposed lactation courses into three or four parts, including lactation counsellors, technical staff for milk banks, lactation consultants, and managers.

- Emphasis on starting with simple lactation management centers before pursuing milk banks.
- Certification courses suggested for lactation counselors with 40 hours of training and 5 days of hands-on experience.
- Mention a successful experience where breastfeeding rates increased to 98% after implementing lactation management centers.
- Identification of three main roles: lactation counselors, technical staff for milk banks, and lactation consultants, each requiring specific training.
- Highlighting the importance of lactation counselors in managing nutrition for mothers.
- Suggestion to offer certification courses for lactation counselors, a degree for milk bank managers, and varying courses from 6 months to a year for lactation consultants.
- Recognition of the need for additional training for the milk bank manager, covering equipment maintenance, logistics, and sample testing.
- Anticipation of the popularity of short-duration lactation counselor courses, especially with governments promoting lactation management units.
- Advocacy for providing lactation counselors at every birthing point, from district hospitals to community care points.
- Acknowledgment of the practicality and effectiveness of shorter-duration courses, such as 15 days, for attracting participants.
- Acknowledgment of the need for university compliance, suggesting a minimum duration of 15 days or one month for certificate courses.
- Consideration of lengthening the course to incorporate nutrition education for mothers.

Dr Mangala Bharthi. S

- Concerns raised about the focus on the duration of the lactation course.
- Emphasis on the challenge of employing individuals exclusively for lactation roles in public sector hospitals.
- The concern regarding the recognition and acceptance of certifications for employment purposes.
- Doubt about the feasibility of governments and administrators employing two different types of professionals for lactation management centers.

- Suggestion for a unique course addressing multiple domains, including lactation, equipment management, logistics, and counseling skills.
- Emphasis on practical exposure, proposing a longer duration (6 months to a year) for comprehensive training.
- Proposal for a single course that covers various aspects and equips individuals for positions in lactation management centers.
- Recognition of the need for a certification differentiating individuals with practical experience.
- A call for consideration of a course that fills the gap and addresses the needs of comprehensive lactation management centers.

Dr Kesavulu

- Highlighting the massive birth cohort in the country (26 to 27 million babies) and the proliferation of human milk banks.
- Citing NFHS 5 data, pointing out that despite 88% of institutional deliveries, only 41% of mothers initiate breastfeeding.
- Emphasizing the need for a large number of counselors, proposing counselors in every birthing unit.
- Mentioning government programs like skilled birth attendant training and stating they have not been entirely successful.
- Associating with BPNI, engaging in various training programs, including one-week training for counselors and two-week training for national trainers.
- Expressing the importance of self-employment opportunities for course graduates.
- Suggesting the concept of a Comprehensive Lactation Management Center (CLC) involving consultants, counselors, and staff with specialized training.
- Proposing a structured approach with three categories of professionals: basic breastfeeding counselor, consultant, and a person managing the human milk bank.
- Advocating for collaboration between the university and existing organizations (like BPNI and IAP chapters) to enhance the program.
- Concluding with the idea of having three distinct roles to address the multifaceted aspects of lactation and human milk bank management.

Dr Sridhar Ryavanki

- Creating new human resources has always been a challenge in the public health systems in India. In the last 15 to 20 years, we have seen new positions under NHM managerial positions at SPMU/DPMU/BPMU, ASHAs and dedicated nurses for SNCUs, CHOs at HWCs. Even these positions have always been contractual.
- Even if the state creates positions for Lactational Consultant and trains Nurses for the same, there could be high attrition rates.
- Discussing the limited permanent positions, such as CHOs in Health and Wellness Centers.
- When we are planning for a new course in the University we need to assess employability and demand for graduates in the market.
- We have seen several courses being started successfully but faced challenges with no takers for upcoming batches.
- Comprehensive Lactational Management Center guidelines by the MOHFW specify that the Lactational consultant can be an ANM/Staff Nurse with 3 months of training in existing CLMCs. So if the course is designed, it needs to specify the target audience and the duration. If course is given to other personnel than ANM/SN and if duration is less than 3 months, then they may not be employable at Milk Banks in public health facilities
- Addressing the challenge of creating demand for these professionals in the market, both in the public health sector and private hospitals.
- The current need and the programs in public health is to train existing staff, like nurses (labor room, PNC, SNCU) and pediatricians, in supporting breastfeeding without requiring a degree or diploma.
- Mentioning the shortage of postnatal ward nurses and the potential role of trained nurses in supporting breastfeeding.
- Midwifery training of 18 months for nurses in labor rooms has been initiated in India, which has a strong component of training in lactation management. If such midwives are posted in health facilities there would be less uptake for a separate/dedicated lactational counselor.
- Suggesting a more comprehensive role for lactational counselors, incorporating maternal nutrition, early stimulation for child development, immunization counseling, and support for kangaroo care. Such expertise may have more employable opportunities.

- Proposing a broader nomenclature for counselors to make them more relevant and impactful in various hospital settings.

Dr. K Karthikeyan

- Shared experiences in conducting a 3-month certificate course on lactation management and breastfeeding.
- Initially, focusing on lactation but later including breastfeeding and counseling skills in the course.
- Conducting courses since 2019, with each batch having around 24 nurses.
- Open for doctors, nurses, and allied health sciences, but learners mostly from the nursing side.
- Not many takers in the last year, prompting a need for refinement.
- Team categorizing into learners and beneficiaries, aiming to make the course part-time and online to attract more participants.
- Highlighting the importance of supporting mothers through skilled lactation consultants for successful breastfeeding.
- Designing the course to be affordable for staff nurses with a fee structure considering their income.
- Emphasizing the need for practical sessions and favorable duration to make the course helpful for both the university and learners.

Future Directions:

- Explore the potential of specialized courses catering to specific nutritional requirements in donor milk, considering the active involvement of nutritionists in the process.
- Leverage the positive impact observed in staff after BPNI training, indicating the importance of continued collaboration with BPNI for enhancing the success of lactation courses.
- Develop customized courses tailored to individuals with diverse backgrounds, such as staff nurses, ANMs, BSc in nutrition, or diploma holders, ensuring inclusivity and relevance.
- Address challenges faced in milk banks, such as continuous culture positives, by implementing stringent training programs for milk bank managers to enhance efficiency and safety.

- Streamline the recruitment process for lactation counselors and managers, incorporating comprehensive training modules and stringent educational qualifications.
- Address concerns regarding the lack of stipulated processes and protocols for milk banks, seeking solutions and establishing standardized procedures for effective and consistent operations.
- Implement a structured approach to course development, starting with foundational certificate courses and allowing progression to higher levels based on individual interest and aptitude.
- Recognize the urgent need for shorter-duration courses in milk banking to align with the increasing number of milk banks, fostering efficiency and rapid skill acquisition.
- Consider the development of an extended course covering nutrition, lactation, and milk banking at a diploma or graduation level to address long-term educational needs.
- Explore the possibility of separate certificate courses for lactation management and milk banking, accompanied by a higher-level course specifically designed for lactation consulting.
- Prioritize affordability in course fees, ensuring accessibility for a broader audience by considering short-term, part-time, and practical-oriented structures.
- Collaborate with BPNI to develop a university-level certificate course lasting at least 3 months, incorporating a balanced blend of theoretical and practical components.
- Address gaps in lactation support by including diverse professionals, such as physiotherapists and nutritionists, in training programs to offer comprehensive care.
- Begin with smaller, focused courses before venturing into larger, more comprehensive programs, aligning with current employment strategies prevalent in various states.

Next Steps and Future Planning:

- This initial meeting served as an exploratory session, and further discussions and detailed curriculum development would be necessary.
- A future meeting was proposed to delve into curriculum development, course structure, syllabus, assessment, and evaluation.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned with the understanding that future discussions and collaboration would be essential to develop a comprehensive lactation management training program.