Informal Milk Sharing: Do we have our heads in the sand?

Purpose: A Perinatal Services BC/BC Baby-Friendly Network working group was formed to develop a practice resource tool kit for health care providers on the use of unpasteurized donor human milk, based on the principles of patient-centered care, informed shared decision making, and harm reduction.

1. What are families saying?

"...I've cried a few times while explaining how grateful my family and I are for their kindness..." A mother explaining how grateful she is for the help she received from a donor family.

When I asked the mothers who had worked in nutrition programs..." A mother explaining her experience with nutrition programs.

"...I don't think I'd be able to breastfeed otherwise..." A mother explaining her experience with using donor human milk.

"...I'm so grateful to the donor family..." A mother expressing gratitude for the donor family's help.

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother expressing amazement at the generosity of strangers.

"...It's a huge transition for the mother..." A mother explaining the transition for the mother.

"...It's a huge transition for the baby..." A mother explaining the transition for the baby.

"...It's a huge transition for the donor family..." A mother explaining the transition for the donor family.

"...It's a huge transition for the community..." A mother explaining the transition for the community.

"...It's a huge transition for the world..." A mother explaining the transition for the world.

2. Who is filling the gap?

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining her experience with using donor human milk.

"...I'm so grateful to the donor family..." A mother expressing gratitude for the donor family's help.

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining the transition for the baby.

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining the transition for the donor family.

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining the transition for the community.

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining the transition for the world.

3. What has been our official response?

"...We have been asked to do a lot of work..." A mother explaining her experience with using donor human milk.

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4. Is all human milk created equal?

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5. Guiding Principles:

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6. Informed Consent:

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7. Milk Sharing Mind Map

"...I've been completely amazed by the generosity of strangers..." A mother explaining her experience with using donor human milk.

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8. The Tool Kit: Resources Developed for Health Care Providers

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9. What’s Next?

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Milk sharing has deep social (and some might argue biological) roots. It’s not going to just go away because health authorities caution against it. It is part of our past, our present, and most likely our future. What is happening online is just scratching the surface.

(Aanchalee Palmaquist, Anthrolactology, 2014)