

Informed decision

What is informed decision?

It is a decision based on knowledge of facts. The process of providing clear, concise and consistent information to parents provides an opportunity to empower them to make an informed decision.

It involves conversations based on the benefits, risks and alternatives regarding the initiation, building and maintenance of lactation, along with the health benefits of own mother's milk (OMM) for vulnerable infants. This enables parents to make a knowledgeable choice and to understand their alternative breastfeeding pathway.

Why is informed decision important?

The science of human milk is powerful and compelling. Mothers almost always decide to initiate milk expression if they understand their milk is an essential medical intervention that no one else can provide.¹⁻⁶

Mothers and families of NICU infants are often in a state of shock, despair and helplessness. Discussion regarding the critical value of milk expression provides a positive focus, changing a parent's outlook to one of hope and a sense of importance in their infant's critical care. Therefore, messaging to families must be standardised, evidence-based and consistent across all perinatal and neonatal units.¹⁻⁶

Mothers consistently report stronger commitment if they understand the evidence-based value of their milk.¹⁻⁶

General breastfeeding information for the healthy term infant is not sufficient or tailored for mothers who are separated from their infant.

How to implement?

Develop / revise protocols⁵

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| <input type="checkbox"/> highlight a commitment to support mothers with infants in the NICU or infants who cannot breastfeed | <input type="checkbox"/> ensure all staff are provided regular education regarding the milk journey and best practice to support lactation within the NICU environment | <input type="checkbox"/> recommend information to be given to mothers and families before delivery whenever possible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ensure all mothers are given evidence-based information on the science of OMM in order to make informed decisions on their own lactation | <input type="checkbox"/> ensure all education materials for staff to use with mothers fully support OMM as a medical intervention and optimal nutrition for NICU infants | <input type="checkbox"/> state the information given in the early days should focus on the value of OMM and how to build an adequate milk supply |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ensure all lactation information is documented in the medical records | | <input type="checkbox"/> ensure continued education and support to empower mothers to achieve their lactation goals in the early critical window of the first 14 days |

How to audit?

Strategies to measure best practice include:

- Audit if antenatal lactation discussion on the science of OMM for the NICU infant occurred.
- Audit if postnatal lactation discussion on the science of OMM for the NICU infant occurred.

Regular auditing of records should occur on a monthly basis:

- Highlights recent progress and can enhance motivation within the organisation to continue with quality improvement measures.
- Shows where changes are still required and allows for timely implementation of further education to staff for continuous improvements in clinical practice.
- Allows barriers to be identified and addressed.