



Comments on the new Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes

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Please respond to

Dear Sir/madam:

As a frontline neonatal doctor in HA hospital, I need to voice out my opinion on the new code. As a full supporter of breast feeding, I still see a significant portion of mothers who cannot BF their babies for various reasons. This cause excessive weight loss, hypoglycaemia and severe neonatal jaundice. Imagine in a busy Obs ward, mothers are placed in a stressful environment after delivery. Usually, they are discharged home in 1-2 days. Furthermore, a large portion of the mothers are from mainland who need to go back as soon as possible. There is simply not enough time for counseling for breast feeding and many of them use infant formula. Many of mothers tried very hard to breast feed at home, but the rate drop gradually with time due to various unfavorable conditions in HK, such as work and stress. Here are some of my opinion on the new Code:

- The Codex Alimentarius has already set the safety standard of milk substitutes, which was endorsed by WHO & FAO. The proposed draft code is too stringent compared with other developed countries.
- Difficult for HCP to promote Breast feeding to 36 months of age in current shortage of manpower.
- Manufactures should be in better position to explain the use of infant formulae rather than HCP in terms of product knowledge. Alternatively, It is dangerous for mothers to seek knowledge from internet and buy parallel imported milk formula which are deficient in nutritious contents. The recent saga of MF deficient in iodine stand attest to this.
- Without enough BF support from Government on Breast Feeding and BF consultants, the Code imposes extra workload to HCP in HA hospitals who should be focus on saving life, not teaching feeding method.
- Banning advertisement of Milk formula violates the free trade policy of WTO. It is easier to control the contents of advertisement rather than forbiddance. If junk food like McDonald can advertise, it seems unwise to ban infant formula.

- Some milk formulae can improve nutrition of babies with special needs, such as pre-mature formula
- The new code will affect sponsorship for CME activities and academic activities for paediatricians.

Sincerely,

Dr. KL Cheung