

PRESS RELEASE

DIETITIANS IN SUPPORT OF WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

1st August 2013

In line with various organisations across the world, the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) will be observing World Breastfeeding Week from 1st to 7th August 2013. The official theme “Breastfeeding Support: Close to Mothers” aims to draw attention to the importance of peer support in helping mothers to establish and sustain breastfeeding.

According to ADSA, dietitians, as experts in nutrition throughout a person’s life, have a responsibility to promote and support breastfeeding for its short-term and long-term benefits for both mothers and infants, essentially making dietetics an important part of the peer support circle. The support circle, as promoted by World Breastfeeding Week, also includes family and social networks, the workplace, government and healthcare. Dietitians are able to provide essential nutritional support to help young mothers continue breastfeeding while at the same time providing them with the nutritional advice they need to maintain a healthy diet that is optimal for breastfeeding.

Even though a global health recommendation states that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health, available trend data from UNICEF indicates very slow advancement in improving overall exclusive breastfeeding rates (33 to 38%) over the last decade in 86 developing countries. Countries that have shown strong commitment to improving exclusive breastfeeding have made significant progress (more than 20% increase on average in 20 countries).

To date there are still many barriers preventing mothers from breastfeeding. One such barrier is the workplace. According to ADSA spokesperson Lisanne du Plessis (Dietitian and Senior Lecturer focusing on Community Nutrition at Stellenbosch University) work responsibilities are often the reason why mothers stop breastfeeding. “Employers need to be made aware of the benefits to them if mothers continue breastfeeding until a child is at least six months old. Companies in America and Britain have found that when mother’s keep on breastfeeding they are away from work less often (healthier children)

and more mothers return to work after their maternity leave if they are able to continue breastfeeding. A supportive policy in this regard also ensures staff loyalty and higher staff retention. In South Africa though many employers still need to be convinced that mothers have the right to maternity leave and that they will benefit if their mothers breastfeed.”

In 2011 the South African Department of Health, Directorate: Nutrition pledged its support to breastfeeding, declaring South Africa as a country where breastfeeding will be supported. According to Du Plessis employers should constantly be informed and reminded of the advantages of breastfeeding.

Du Plessis concludes: “There are many influences at different levels in a mother’s environment, which can either support or hinder her ability and effort to breastfeed. Dietitians and employers both play an essential role and are essential parts of the circle of support as highlighted as part of World Breastfeeding Week 2013.”

Ends

World Breastfeeding Week 2013 activities and contacts:

In line with the 2013 World Breastfeeding Week theme, the Department of Health together with key development partners have planned to conduct community engagements with key target groups with the aim of identifying factors that have an influence on promoting and supporting breastfeeding as well as exploring ways to overcome them.

The objectives of the community engagements are to determine knowledge, barriers and enablers to promote and support optimal breastfeeding practices; to explore approaches that will ensure support from family and community to sustain breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding; and to gather information and insights to improve future programming and messaging on breastfeeding.

The Department of Health has developed and printed detailed pamphlets on the benefits of breastfeeding, which can be shared with the community and will be handed out at clinics and hospitals. For further information on how to access these pamphlets please contact Pontsho Malibe on (012) 395 8509 / 12 or pontshomalibe@yahoo.com

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