

ISSUE PAPER ON NEED FOR LICENSURE OF LACTATION CONSULTANTS

BACK- GROUND

The public health agenda has recognized and promoted breastfeeding, resulting in initiation rates increasing from 26% in 1970 to 79% in 2014. However, many women struggle to maintain breastfeeding for as long as it is recommended and fail to achieve the intensity and duration of breastfeeding that they planned. The breastfeeding duration rates remain low because of inadequate breastfeeding education and support once breastfeeding has been initiated. This is often due to poor access to qualified clinical lactation care within the medical system.

PROBLEM

There is great confusion by both consumers and the medical community about the meaning of titles and the training requirements for various lactation care providers. For example, anyone can call themselves a “lactation consultant” regardless of their level of training or qualifications. There is often a mistaken assumption that everyone using the title lactation consultant possesses equivalent, and adequate, training and credentials. This presents a significant risk to women and their babies. Licensure is the only way to assure public safety and improve access to the level of lactation care and services that mothers need.

RECOGNITION

The *U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding* recognizes International Board Certified Lactation Consultants® (IBCLC®) as the only health care professionals certified in lactation care and recommends their licensure. An IBCLC is an allied healthcare provider and a member of the maternal-child healthcare team with specialized skills in clinical lactation care and management. The IBCLC credential is the preeminent certification for the provision of clinical lactation care and services. While many training courses provide a certificate of completion, only the IBCLC credential denotes certification in lactation consultation. The IBCLC works in a variety of settings including hospitals, clinics, physician’s offices, public health, human milk banks, and private practice. Research has documented improved breastfeeding outcomes when mothers and infants receive the services of an IBCLC.

WHAT WOULD LICENSURE DO?

Licensure of lactation consultants would:

- Provide consumers, health care providers, insurers and employers with the ability to identify qualified lactation consultants;
- Provide a means of standardized practice and maintaining sound oversight of lactation professionals;
- Allow reimbursement within the health care system that will enable access to timely, skilled, and competent clinical lactation services for all mothers and babies;
- Positively impact the growth of the profession by facilitating employment of adequate numbers of the IBCLC lactation consultants needed to meet current and future needs.

Licensure of lactation consultants would *not* prevent qualified members of other professions or occupations, or volunteers, from performing functions consistent with the accepted standards of their respective professions.