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Date: March 2011
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For immediate release

Should Infant Feeding Recommendations Be Based on Science?

In a new study in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), 36 new mothers and supporters including family members and health care providers shared the difficulties and challenges they faced related to breastfeeding. The women spoke poignantly about their disappointment and disillusionment when the experience they anticipated was at odds with the reality they faced. The authors concluded that the recommendation for exclusive breastfeeding for six months is “unrealistic” and suggested that more “achievable incremental goals” be set.

The United States Lactation Association (USLCA) recognizes the real obstacles, barriers and challenges encountered by many breastfeeding mothers. However, changing infant feeding recommendation is not the solution. Recommended health practices are and should continue to be scientifically based. There is abundant scientific evidence supporting breastfeeding as the healthful norm for mothers and babies. This evidence clearly indicates that decreased breastfeeding increases the risk for both acute and chronic disease. What is needed is not less breastfeeding, but more support during the early days and weeks of breastfeeding---something International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are strategically equipped to provide.

Surgeon General Regina Benjamin rightly stated that a mother’s ability to begin and to continue breastfeeding can be influenced by a host of community factors. She called for environmental changes to support breastfeeding in families, in hospitals, and in the workplace, all supported by programs, policies and education. Women in the BMJ study expressed their desire for a shift of support away from the prenatal period to the time period after the birth. IBCLCs in health centers, at WIC, and in private practice work with families through the transition to home, the adjustment period of the first few weeks, preparation for return to the workplace, the introduction of solid foods and beyond. As experts in infant

feeding and education that includes child development and counseling, IBCLCs are positioned use the “proactive family-centered narrative approach” advocated by the study’s authors.

USLCA supports all mothers and celebrates the efforts they make to do the best for their infants, their families, and their communities. For more information about IBCLCs, visit www.uslca.org.