

## **Summary of Roundtable Discussion on Designing a Course on Lactation Management, Breastfeeding and Maternal Health**

**Date:** 21st November 2023 (**Online**)

**Time:** 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

The roundtable discussion brought together an esteemed group of academicians, medical professionals, entrepreneurs, and policymakers for a critical roundtable discussion. This gathering aimed to leverage collective expertise in shaping a forward-looking curriculum course in Lactation Management, Breastfeeding, and Maternal Health, tailored to India's unique context.

### **Purpose of the Round Table:**

The primary purpose of that roundtable discussion was to collectively explore and assess the feasibility and potential benefits of introducing a comprehensive course in Lactation at Rishihood University in collaboration with Sushena Health Foundation.

### **Participants:**

Shri Shobhit Mathur, Vice Chancellor and Co-founder, Rishihood University

Dr Anil Kaul, Dean, School of Healthcare, Rishihood University

Dr Santhosh Kumar Kraleti, Associate Dean, School of Healthcare, Rishihood University

Dr. Srinivas Murki, Paramitha Children Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Kalavapalli Durga Bhavani, Idea Clinics, Hyderabad

Dr. Alimelu, Nilaufer Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Sanjeev Upadhaya, Former Health Specialist, UNICEF and USAID

Dr Swapna, Nilaufer Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Tejo Pratap Oleti, Fernandez Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Shacchee Baweja, Paediatrician IBCLC, BLK MAX Super-speciality Hospital, Delhi

Dr Sneha Madasu, Niloufer Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Amrita Sarkar, TRIHMS Naharlagun, Arunachal Pradesh

Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, Dean, RSPL, Rishihood University

Dr Gunjan Rajput, Deputy Registrar, Rishihood University

Poonam Nehra, Faculty, Rishihood University

### **Introduction:**

- **Shri Shobhit Mathur & Dr Anil Kaul**, provided a brief overview of the University and school. The mission to reinvent higher education to serve the needs of society and the world was highlighted.
- **Dr. Kalavapalli Durga Bhavani** explained the mission and activities of Sushena Health Foundation, a not-for-profit organization focused on maternal and child health, lactation management, and quality improvement initiatives.
- **Dr Santosh Kumar Kraleti** provided an overview of the goals of the meeting. The importance of lactation management and breastfeeding, especially in the context of improving maternal and child health in India, was emphasized. The need to develop a skilled and passionate workforce to support breastfeeding was discussed.

### **Exploring the Need for a Lactation Management Training Program:**

- It was recognized that while India has a high rate of institutional deliveries, there is a significant gap in early initiation of breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding.
- There is a need for a course that would provide hands-on and on-the-ground experience.
- The need for a robust curriculum and experienced faculty members was emphasized.

### **Summary:**

During the roundtable discussion, participants delved into various crucial aspects related to the proposed comprehensive course in Lactation. They explored the differentiation of training levels for lactation professionals, emphasizing the importance of certification and recertification processes. The discussion also covered mentoring, continuing education, and practical training considerations, acknowledging the need for trainers' training and addressing cost considerations. Participants examined growth opportunities and timelines for program launch, with a strategic focus on targeting healthcare professionals and creating pathways for their professional advancement. The incorporation of a systems thinking approach into course content was highlighted, along with a specific emphasis on nutrition in breastfeeding research. The participants discussed the delicate balance between course demand and employment opportunities, stressing the significance of communication skills and attitude in counseling. Further considerations included attracting healthcare professionals to lactation, exploring sponsorship opportunities, and designing practical, on-the-ground courses with appropriate

stratification levels. Overall, the roundtable aimed to establish a comprehensive and well-structured framework for the proposed lactation course, taking into account diverse perspectives and critical elements.

### **Inputs from the participants:**

#### *Dr. Srinivas Murki*

- We need to develop a trained workforce for milk banks due to the increasing number of such banks across the country.
- Lack of well-trained personnel in existing milk banks, with over 200-300 banks but inadequate training.
- Milk banks function as comprehensive lactation management centres requiring diverse skill sets. Aim to develop a workforce beyond lactation counsellors, including nurses and counsellors with specific skills like motivating mothers, expressing milk, and addressing lactation problems.
- There is a need for managerial personnel to run milk banks efficiently, understanding the milk collection process, dispersal, and overall organization.
- Propose the organization of courses into certificate, diploma, or degree categories to cater to varying skill levels and responsibilities.
- Emphasize the importance of identifying potential candidates based on their skill sets and interests, considering individuals from diverse educational backgrounds.
- Address the importance of determining where the trained workforce will be posted, such as in Community Lactation Centers (CLCs) or hospitals.
- Advocate for adopting a gross need-based approach to course development, ensuring the courses' validity and demand in the healthcare sector.
- Suggest evaluating how other organizations conduct similar certification or diploma courses to ensure alignment with goals and identify unique features.
- Recognize a significant knowledge gap in existing milk banks due to their relatively new concept, with most banks developed in the last 3-4 years. Lack of structured programs has led to experimentation rather than standardized training. Highlight that each state is attempting to organize more milk banks, with Rajasthan having the highest number. However, many states are yet to establish them.

- Identify an immediate need for skilled personnel, especially in government sectors, where 800 lactation management units (LMUs) are expected to be attached to essential newborn care units. These units require individuals with skills in lactation counselling, management, breastfeeding, and expression.
- Individuals in this field earn an average of around 25,000, similar to entry-level AGM nurses.
- Highlight existing guidelines, such as the requirement for CLMCs (Comprehensive Lactation Management Centers) in NICUs (Neonatal Intensive Care Units), and the struggle for accreditation due to the lack of CLCs (Comprehensive Lactation Consultants).

***Dr. Kalavapalli Durga Bhavani***

- Propose different course modules with varied eligibility criteria. Stratify based on roles like grassroots worker, district-level worker, lactation consultant, and milk bank manager.
- Emphasize the need for properly structured training followed by mentorship. Suggest a continuing mentorship approach with opportunities for students to present cases.
- Re-certification or refresher courses every 5 years. Propose a course for training trainers to create a chain reaction of trainers.
- Hierarchy and Growth Opportunities: Introduce a ladder system to allow growth from a ground-level role to a lactation consultant.
- Highlight the need for on-field mentoring to enhance practical skills and real-world application. Recommend a 50% theory and 50% practical balance in course content.
- Stress the importance of hands-on orientation and interactive learning.
- Mention the need for affordable courses, avoiding excessive charges.
- Propose the inclusion of hospital postings for bedside clinical skills.

***Dr. Alimelu***

- Propose a structured lactation management program akin to NRP training.
- Emphasize the need for continuous improvement and practical training.
- Stress the importance of engaging with postnatal mothers, providing handouts and flip charts.
- Highlight the significance of training individuals to also educate attenders around mothers.
- Suggest a training format with 30% classroom and 70% practical components.

***Dr. Sanjeev Upadhaya***

- Emphasizes the lack of a well-trained resource pool in lactation management, noting the prevalence of short courses in government schemes and learning by doing.
- Stresses the importance of pedagogy over content, especially in counselling, and the need for intense training and effective communication skills.
- Acknowledges the challenge of balancing course demand with employment opportunities, advocating for a focus on pedagogy to produce skilled individuals.
- Supports a system thinking approach and the importance of participants feeling part of a larger goal.
- Expresses a need for planning and considering logistics in addressing the identified market demand for lactation courses.

***Dr Swapna***

- Expresses concern about the need for practical skills in lactation counseling, particularly when dealing with complex cases like preterm babies with palate issues.
- Advocates for a course structure with a substantial focus on practical training (70%) rather than theory, emphasizing the uniqueness of each patient's situation.
- Stresses the importance of trainers having deep experience and specialized knowledge to effectively address the diverse challenges presented by lactating mothers and infants.
- Highlights the ongoing need for continuous training, even for experienced counselors, when faced with specific cases that require more specialized expertise.
- Emphasizes the significance of hands-on, clinical-oriented learning in lactation education, given the intricacies and variability of individual cases.

***Dr. Tejo Pratap Oleti***

- Emphasizes the importance of defining eligible candidates for the lactation education program, suggesting stratification based on existing degrees and skill levels.
- Highlights the need to incorporate scope of work, skill sets, job opportunities, and future prospects in course advertising to attract candidates.
- Advocates for an internship program with clinical credit hours to enhance the practical application of skills learned during certification.

- Proposes collaboration with potential industry partners in the health sector to ensure employment opportunities for certified individuals, aligning with Skill India initiatives.
- Suggests exploring opportunities within Government of India programs like MAA to create avenues for certified individuals in both public and private sectors.
- Stresses the need for a well-designed program to meet the increasing demand for lactation counsellors at various levels, including grassroots workers like Asha and ANM.

***Dr. Shacchee Baweja***

- Stresses the surge in lactation professionals with certificate courses, emphasizing the negative impact on breastfeeding families due to the lack of practical training.
- Calls for a multi-tiered system and on-the-job training to address the uniqueness of each lactation case.
- Advocates for stratification based on clinical practice hours, ensuring different levels of expertise to handle various cases.
- Proposes the establishment of lactation as a separate allied healthcare entity, addressing the absence of a regulatory body and emphasizing alignment with government standards.
- Highlights the need for different training levels based on the work environment, such as normal wards or high-risk settings like NICU.
- Emphasizes adult learning principles for effective education, considering challenges like cranial nerve injuries, muscle tensions, and oral restrictions in breastfeeding.
- Raise awareness about career opportunities for lactation professionals and the struggles they face in securing employment, urging consideration of job assurances in training programs.

***Dr Sneha Madasu***

- Proposes two-course sets: Comprehensive for trainers with milk banking and perinatal experience and Need-based for healthcare professionals.
- Advocates partnering with UNICEF or the Government of India due to low salaries.
- Recommends a program like ICMR's biomedical research education, mandated for postgraduates, and priced around ₹2000.
- Emphasizes the need for lactation education at grassroots levels, particularly for frontline workers like Asha and ANM staff.



- Highlights the Allied Healthcare Act of 2021, focusing on standardizing education for healthcare professionals.
- Points out the act's requirement for 2000 hours of education for lactation professionals.
- Stresses the need to set standards for approving courses and deciding registration and titles.
- Stresses the importance of research and policymaking in lactation education.
- Highlights the prolonged contact duration in lactation, allowing professionals to influence mothers positively.
- Advocates selecting candidates from different regions and diverse fields to bring collective knowledge to the profession.
- Suggests planning both an intense program and smaller certificate programs based on specific needs.

***Dr. Amrita Sarkar***

- Highlights the low rate of exclusive breastfeeding, attributing it to misconceptions, inappropriate advice, and the lack of accessible support for mothers.
- Discusses the shortcomings of existing government initiatives like Ma and POTION Yojna and bfhi, particularly in hospitals, emphasizing the need for a lactation professional course to address these issues.
- Proposes a three-tiered course structure: a. Basic certification (80% theory, 20% practical) for Anganwadi workers or healthcare students. b. Advanced certification (50% theory, 50% practical) for registered doctors, nurses, BSc nursing students, or GNM nurses. c. Diploma (20% theory, 80% practical) for advanced certificate holders with 1000 hours of clinical training.
- Recommends a flexible online component and offline internship programs for working professionals, along with a strong emphasis on hands-on clinical training and case studies.
- Advocates for a refresher course, collaboration with existing lactation professionals for mentorship, and incorporation of communication skills and community-building in the curriculum.
- Suggests a multidisciplinary teaching team comprising pediatricians, community medicine specialists, gynecologists, and certified lactation professionals to provide comprehensive education.

*Dr. Sanjeev Kumar*

- Emphasizes a system thinking approach in course content, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of how individual actions contribute to societal impacts.
- Suggests designing course content to instil excitement in lactation professionals by linking their work to broader societal functioning.
- Mentions a background in health economics and explores the idea of incorporating lactation centre management as a speciality for management students.
- Share insights from work at Yale on breastfeeding and nutrition, highlighting the importance of understanding the role of nutrition in breastfeeding, especially in the context of food insecurity.

*Dr Gunjan Rajput*

- For a 3-year undergraduate (UG) degree, 120 credits are required, and for a 4-year UG degree, 160 credits are mandated.
- A credit defines the instructional load, with one credit equal to 15 hours of theory or 30 hours of practical (which is double of theory).
- Semester duration is 15 weeks, but the course can be adjusted based on the mode of delivery.
- Assessment criteria must be designed to map the learning outcomes.
- Three program options:
  - a. Degree (40% online allowed, 120 credits)
  - b. Diploma (40 credits, approval from regulatory bodies required)
  - c. Certificate (no mandate on credits or assessment, can be a professional program)
- The team and experts have the flexibility to decide the program type based on their preferences and goals.

**Current Scenario of Lactation Education:**

- **Lactation Professionals:** Allied healthcare professionals working between disciplines.
  - ❖ Roles: Advocates, clinical experts, collaborators with mothers and primary healthcare providers.
  - ❖ Work in various settings—individual clinics, milk banks, hospitals, academia, and research.



- **Knowledge and Skills Required:** Encompasses diverse areas, including pediatric knowledge, public health, teaching, pregnancy nutrition, examination skills, pharmacology, legal frameworks, social dynamics, and counselling skills.
- **Target Audience for Lactation Education:** Includes professionals from overlapping fields: Paediatricians, public health professionals, midwives, gynaecologists, nutritionists, physiotherapists, etc.
- **Credentials in the Field:**
  - ❖ Certified Lactation Educator: Focus on educating pregnant mothers.
  - ❖ Certified Lactation Counselors: Assist mothers in problem-solving.
  - ❖ IBCLC (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant): Highest credential, granted by IBCLC.
- **IBCLC Credential Requirements:**
  - ❖ Health Science degree with 2 years of exposure.
  - ❖ 90 hours of lactation-specific education, 5 hours of counseling-specific education.
  - ❖ experience:
    - Pathway 1 (1000 hours),
    - Pathway 2 (500 hours mentored) or (300 hours with institute tie-up).
- **International Options:** Various online global options, including a basic 20-hour WHO program for healthcare professionals, are available.
- **Indian Scenario:** Lactation education in India is relatively unregulated and new, presenting an opportunity to set quality standards.
  - ❖ Recognised programs include Hinduja Hospital, BPNI's in-person certificate course, and Beginner India's -approved online program.
  - ❖ Beginner India's Model: Offers different programs based on hours, reflecting a useful model for curriculum integration.
  - ❖ Swayam app provides a free Maternal and Infant Young Child Nutrition course, with an optional ₹1000 certificate.
  - ❖ Public Health Foundation of India's course, sponsored by Alive and Thrive, is available for ₹2000.

### **Future Directions and Regulations:**

- Discussed the Allied Healthcare Act of 2021, which aims to standardize education for allied healthcare professionals, including lactation professionals.
- The need to establish standards for courses, registration, and titles was mentioned.
- The role of lactation professionals in advocating for breastfeeding and promoting evidence-based practices was emphasized.
- The importance of grassroots training and education for healthcare workers at all levels.
- The next steps would include further discussions on curriculum development, regulatory matters, and the establishment of standards for lactation education in India.

### **Next Steps and Future Planning:**

- This initial meeting served as an exploratory session, and further discussions and detailed curriculum development would be necessary.
- A future meeting was proposed to delve into curriculum development, course structure, syllabus, assessment, and evaluation.

### **Meeting Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned with the understanding that future discussions and collaboration would be essential to develop a comprehensive lactation management training program.