

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

Date: 12 December 2023 (Online)

Time: 4:30 PM – 6:30 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 Gunjan Rajput, Deputy Registrar, Rishihood University

Dr T. Chandrasekhara Reddy, Pediatrician, Sri RamaChandra Children's and Dental Hospital, Guntur

Dr. Satyanarayana, Pediatrician, Ankura Hospital Gachibowli, Hyderabad

Dr. Ravi Shankar, MD - Pediatrics, DM – Neonatology, Sowmya Childrens Hospital, Hyderabad

Dr. Bhoopendra Sharma, Professor & Head, Pediatrics deptt., B.R.D Medical College, Gorakhpur

Dr Bendapudi Perraju, Assistant Professor, Department of Neonatology, School of Medicine, Kochi

Dr. Shailaja Mane, MD (Pediatrics), PhD, IBCLC, Siddhi Children's & Teen's Clinic, Pune

Dr. Manikyamba, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Poonam Nehra, Assistant Professor, Rishihood University

Exploring the Need for a Lactation Education 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:

The meeting brought together various perspectives on lactation education, with participants emphasizing the need for collaboration between civil society and academia. Rishihood University, recognized for its impact-oriented approach, aims to produce graduates capable of influencing society and global healthcare. Discussions covered lactation professionals' interdisciplinary roles, core knowledge requirements, and the importance of certified courses. Dr Shailaja Mane shared success stories from the first private milk bank, highlighting the reduction in neonatal morbidity. Concerns about formula feeding, financial burdens, and the need for online components were raised, with proposals for hybrid courses. Dr T.C. Reddy proposed tailored courses for medical personnel and paediatric nurses, while Dr Ravi Shankar underscored the demand for lactation support and suggested a "Lactation Championship Program." Dr Manikayamba emphasized the practical work's impact, suggesting ties with corporate hospitals for data collection. Dr Bhupender Sharma shared experiences from the Gorakhpur OPD, where lactation counsellors assist in understanding feeding concepts. Dr Santhosh discussed courses targeting different roles and the inclusion of practical components, highlighting the importance of communication skills and attitude in lactation counselling. Overall, the meeting highlighted the urgency, scope, and diverse approaches needed to comprehensively address lactation education.

Inputs from the participants:

Shri Shobhit Mathur

- Provided a brief overview of the Rishihood University.
- These topics are often sidelined in formal university discussions, primarily addressed by civil society.
- Emphasis on the need for collaboration between civil society and academia to address these topics academically.

- Rishihood University focuses on shaping individuals for societal problem-solving alongside industry relevance.
- Positioned as an impact-oriented university, aiming to produce graduates influence society, nation, and the world.
- Unique approach with schools dedicated to healthcare systems, technology, entrepreneurship, creativity, psychology, and education.
- Invites collaboration and expertise to contribute to the movement shaping Rishihood.

Dr Santosh Kumar Kraleti

- Provided a brief overview of the School of Healthcare & Sushena Health Foundation.
- Rishihood University focuses on unconventional courses in the School of Healthcare, aiming to produce students who will impact global healthcare.
- Emphasis on the WHO's One Health concept, highlighting the interconnectedness of animal health, nature, ecology, agriculture, and human health.
- Recognition of the importance of addressing ecological imbalances, especially evident during the COVID pandemic.
- Desire to contribute to healthcare financing and improve healthcare quality in the public health domain in India.
- Aspiring to develop leaders in health economics and international global health to make a significant impact.
- Sushena Health Foundation, with a 7-year history, has been working in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child health, and adolescence.
- Initiatives include human milk banks, breastfeeding projects, Kangaroo mother care centres, and quality improvement initiatives.
- Recognizing the need for a well-trained workforce in lactation, leading to the establishment of a curriculum development committee for lactation counselling and consulting at Rishihood University.

Poonam Nehra

- Provided a brief overview of Lactation Education in India and Globally.
- Lactation professionals as interdisciplinary healthcare advocates and collaborators.
- Core knowledge and skills required for lactation professionals, including various areas like paediatrics, public health, nutrition, and counselling skills.
- The target audience for lactation education spans various healthcare professions, including nurses, nutritionists, physiotherapists, and mental health professionals.
- Three major designations for lactation professionals: certified lactation educators, certified lactation counsellors, and the International Board of Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC).

- Rigorous credential requirements for IBCLC, including a health science degree, specific education hours, counselling education, and practical experience.
- Global courses for lactation education, including university programs and online courses from organizations like Lactation Education Resources, Breastfeeding Outlook, ALPP and Gold Learning.
- Overview of lactation education in India, highlighting recognized programs at Hinduja Hospital, BPNI, Begin Ed India, Swayam App, PHFI Course sponsored by Alive and Thrive.
- Discussion on the need for affordable and accessible lactation courses, with a focus on building something suitable for both allied healthcare and medical professionals.
- Request for perspectives on the need for university-certified courses.

Dr Shailaja Mane

- Overview of the first private milk bank at Doctor Devi Patel Medical College Hospital and Research Center, Pune, addressing initial challenges, establishing an advanced human milk bank, and contributing to reduced neonatal morbidity.
- Success in reducing hypoglycemia, hyperbilirubinemia, sepsis, necrotizing enterocolitis, and overall mortality.
- Personal experience as a trained IBCLC and the importance of context-specific lactation courses.
- Initiation of a 6-month lactation counselling certificate course at the university, with a focus on practical skills building.
- Discussion on the need for proper scientific information and skills building, distinguishing from short online courses.
- Specialized counselling course majorly attracting doctors, paediatricians, BAMS doctors, nursing staff, and dieticians.
- Hope for the creation of lactation counsellors as Allied healthcare professionals in India, expanding the course offerings.

Dr Perraju

- Emphasis on the need for lactation courses due to the prevalence of formula feeding and a decline in breastfeeding rates.
- Concern about the widespread use of milk powders and the impact on breastfeeding in the community.
- Recognition of the importance of raising awareness in the community for sustained breastfeeding support.
- Challenge of standing out in the market and ensuring the course has a lasting impact on breastfeeding practices.
- Consideration of the target audience's qualifications and the importance of training the trainers.

- Reflection on the struggle when babies return to the clinic having switched to formula feeding.
- Acknowledgment of the need for online components to make the course more accessible and sustainable.
- Mention of the NFHS-5 statistics indicating concerning breastfeeding rates in India.
- Exploration of the course structure, fees, and practical components to align with the Indian context.
- Realistic consideration of the financial burden on participants and the need for online didactic teaching.
- Comparison with breastfeeding courses in the UK where hospitals sponsor training costs.
- Proposal for a hybrid course combining online theoretical aspects with face-to-face practical components.
- Consideration of certification options and incentives for doctors, such as CPD points.
- Suggestion to bring in invited speakers from abroad to offer diverse perspectives and avoid tunnel vision.
- Awareness of existing online courses from institutions like Stanford and the importance of standing out in the competitive landscape.

Dr T.C. Reddy

- Acknowledgment of the felt need for lactation courses to support feeding mothers.
- Recognition of challenges faced by healthcare professionals in assisting, including time constraints and gender-related hesitations.
- Proposal for two types of courses: one for medical personnel (practitioner consultants) and another for paediatric nurses.
- Suggestion for the medical personnel course to be akin to NRP (Neonatal Resuscitation Program) to ensure comprehensive lactation management knowledge.
- Emphasis on empowering every paediatric nurse in paediatric hospitals through a course similar to basic NRP, focusing on essential information and skills for lactation support.
- Recognition of the widespread need for lactation assistance and the importance of increasing the base by training nurses to handle lactation issues.
- Proposal to design and implement a countrywide course involving organizations like NNF (National Neonatology Forum) and IAP (Indian Academy of Paediatrics).
- Recommendation to devise a course resembling the structure of the NRP program for effective and widespread lactation education.

Dr Ravi Shankar

- Recognition of the evident need for lactation counsellors and consultants.
- Acknowledgment of the substantial gap between the demand and availability of lactation support.

- Emphasis on education as a key solution to bridge the existing gap.
- Agreement with the suggestion to target two main groups: nurses and consultants.
- Commitment to coordinate with organizations like NNF (National Neonatology Forum) and IAP (Indian Academy of Pediatrics) in Andhra Pradesh to support the initiative.
- Proposal to use the term "Lactation champions" instead of "Lactation counsellors" to empower and elevate the role of nursing staff.
- Support for the idea of a "Lactation Championship Program" to emphasize the leadership and impactful role of participants.

Dr Satyanarayana

- Proposal to conduct a short experiment to identify potential trainees in different healthcare professions.
- Suggestion to survey existing course content and measure its impact on trainees in the Indian context.
- Consideration of a post-certification study to assess the impact of the course on trainees' performance in real-world scenarios.
- Proposal for a short thesis or project as part of the course, focusing on Qi-based research.
- Emphasis on practical work and its impact on promoting breastfeeding, contributing to milk banks, and dealing with different scenarios in government and private hospitals.
- Proposal to establish ties with corporate hospitals for data collection and improvement of course curriculum.
- Reference to the issue of inconsistent practices, such as the use of pacifiers and nipple shields, among counsellors, highlighting the need for uniformity.

Dr Manikayamba

- Acknowledgment of the time constraints faced by paediatricians and neonatologists in addressing lactation needs.
- Emphasis on the importance of training staff nurses and lactation counsellors to sustain lactation in NICU setups.
- Proposal to have a trained staff nurse or lactational counsellor round the clock in each shift, especially for mothers of sick newborns.

Dr Bhupender Sharma

- Recommends the BPNI course of 6 months as a suitable option.
- Shared experiences from the Gorakhpur OPD, where lactation counsellors assist in understanding feeding concepts.

- Highlights his designed course and its focus on counselling for feeding, including complementary feeding.
- Emphasizes the importance of communication skills for counsellors.
- Acknowledges the need for basic and applied knowledge in the breastfeeding course.

Dr Gunjan Rajput

- Explained how credit programs and learning outcomes are structured differently for certificates, diplomas, and degrees.
- 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.

Future Directions:

- There is a need to develop specialized courses for lactation consultants, counsellors/champions, and public health workers.
- Exploring practical components, such as a week of intensive training in milk banks, to provide hands-on experience and enhance the skill set of lactation professionals.
- Proposing a structured approach to progression, suggesting an organic transition from certificate courses to more advanced programs like diplomas and degrees.
- Stressing the importance of expanding the role of lactation counsellors, particularly in government setups, to offer comprehensive support for breastfeeding mothers.
- Underlining the critical role of communication skills and a positive attitude in effective lactation counselling, advocating for their incorporation into training programs.
- Considering the inclusion of a dedicated component focusing on mother's nutrition and complementary feeding within the lactation courses to address holistic maternal and infant well-being.

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 education program.