

A Description of a Male-Focused Breastfeeding Promotion Corporate Lactation Program

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Abstract

The role of the father has been identified as one of the strongest influences on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding by mothers in the United States. This report describes a corporate lactation program that focuses on promoting breastfeeding through male employees. Since 1990, a full-time on-site lactation program has been offered to male employees at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, a public utility company. The male program participants are from diverse backgrounds. Participation in the Fathering Program has grown since 1990 based on word of mouth, fathers' interest in the benefits of breastfeeding for the infant, and the female partners' interest in getting a free pump rental. This report illustrates the viability of a breastfeeding support program that targets male employees and that is offered in a corporate setting. *J Hum Lact.* 18(1):61-65.

Keywords: breastfeeding promotion, father, employment, corporate lactation program

In the United States, the choice to breastfeed is influenced by a series of complex social and institutional forces. The role of the father has been identified as one of the strongest influences on the success of breastfeeding among mothers in the United States. There have been numerous studies looking at the effect of the father's attitudes with regard to breastfeeding initiation and success. It has been shown that the attitudes and actions of partners from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds have an influence on mothers' breastfeeding success. This has led some researchers to suggest that the social framework of the mother is a stronger predictor of breastfeeding initiation than demographics.¹⁻⁷ Indeed, a summary of 11 studies concluded that 75% of all the mothers in the studies identified the father as important in their decision to breastfeed.⁸

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Although fathers do participate in the feeding choice, most studies have found that they are poorly informed about the advantages of breastfeeding.⁹⁻¹¹ In addition to their lack of knowledge, there are numerous unspoken concerns of expectant fathers with regard to breastfeeding that can negatively influence initiation and duration rates. These concerns include diminished sexual relations, feeling left out of feeding the baby, losing the attention of the new mother, and increased needs for attention during the stressful transition of becoming a parent.¹²⁻¹⁴ Because of the male partner's potentially strong influence on a woman's choice to breastfeed and ultimate breastfeeding success, studies conclude that the father should be included in the prenatal preparation for breastfeeding.^{3,15-17}

Some employers have taken a special interest in promoting breastfeeding among their employees, based on the reported advantages to the employer. These advantages include a reduction in absenteeism from work, improved recruiting and retention rates, increased productivity at the work site, reduced infant health care expenses, and reduced maternal stress.¹⁸⁻²² Most of the corporate lactation support programs have focused on the female employee. There are numerous compelling reasons for employers to expand their lactation support programs to include both male and female employees. These reasons include the critical role that most fathers play in the infant-feeding choice, the father's influence

Box 1. Different Marketing Strategies Used for the Fathering Program

Use of photographs of men with babies
Development of task-oriented material
Use of on-site health fair:
1. Place the breast pump (a machine) in the front of the table during health fairs
2. Place the breastfeeding books, kit, and cooler materials in the back of the presentation table during health fairs
3. Feature the fathering books on the front of the table during health fairs
Use of male and female dolls of diverse ethnicities
Printing written materials in masculine colors such as red, blue, yellow, and green
Editing the written material to use appealing words for men such as saying "expectant parent" or "father" versus "expectant families"
Use male references such as sports, that is, call the class "Coaching Class for Expectant Fathers"

on the success of the breastfeeding experience, the reduction of infant health care costs, the need to provide equal benefits, and the potential reduction in male absenteeism as more and more men share equally with their partners in the care of their infants.

The following report describes a corporate lactation program that provides breastfeeding education and services for the male employee and his partner. This is the first report describing such a program.

Recommendations

The Fathering Program

Since 1990, the Fathering Program has been offered at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LA DWP), a public utility company. The fathering program was an expansion of the breastfeeding support program that has been offered to female employees at LA DWP since 1988. To recruit the male participants in the fathering program, a number of different marketing strategies were developed. The strategies used were multifaceted (Box 1).

The Fathering Program has evolved into a program that offers fathers and their partners group breastfeeding education classes, full individual lactation counseling for the fathers and their partners, and breast pumps for the partner's use at home or at her work site. These services are provided by the on-site pediatric obstetric nurse consultant and the nutritionist/lactation educator. Participation in the Fathering Program at LA DWP has always been voluntary.

Because of demands during the work day, participants in the Fathering Program have a choice of how

	Program participants (%)	LA DWP employees (%)
African American	6.3	10.56
Asian	12	6.3
Caucasian	53	40.48
Filipino	4	4
Hispanic	24	15.91
Other	1	1

Figure 1. Fathering program participants by race compared to distribution of race among LA DWP employees.

they receive their breastfeeding instruction. These choices include two group classes of 45 minutes each or approximately 1 hour of individual instruction. The two group classes are organized by subject. The first group class focuses on advantages of breastfeeding, and the second group class focuses on breastfeeding techniques. The second class is held in two subgroups, with men and their partners being instructed separately in response to requests from the employees who felt more comfortable discussing these topics in single-sex groups. The group education classes are specifically designed to address the concerns, issues, and joys that a father might have in relation to breastfeeding. One of the major objectives of these classes is to help the father recognize and accept his vital role in the success of breastfeeding. In addition, the father is informed about how the mother may be too tired after delivery to cope with new information and experiences; how the father needs to be the champion for the mother, baby, and breastfeeding; and how the father's supportive participation increases breastfeeding success. A number of strategies were used to reduce the father's discomfort with the topic of breastfeeding (Box 2).

The fathers who chose individual instruction received the following information: (1) how to care for and use the piston-run pump, (2) how to store and handle expressed breast milk, (3) a breastfeeding book, and (4) a handout titled "Breast Engorgement, Milk Storage and Handling and Sore Nipples."

In addition to classes or individual instruction, participating fathers receive a breast pump, a double-pumping breast pump kit, and instruction from a lactation consultant with regard to the reasons a breast pump is needed. In this way, the lactation consultant is able to screen for any infants or mothers who may have a need for a referral to their primary care provider. This consultation is considered essential for the quality of the program. The

Box 2. Suggestions for Reducing Fathers' Discomfort With the Subject of Breastfeeding

- Emphasize the importance of the male role and how important the father is in caring for the infant
- Focus on the medical benefits for the infant and do not dwell on the subject of the breast
- Discuss the technical aspect of breast milk expression (i.e., the pumps)
- Provide concrete examples about how to support their partner (i.e., bringing meals and changing diaper)
- Teach the men how to check for positioning of the infant at the breast and how to keep track of the urine output and bowel movements during the early breastfeeding period

lactation professionals are also accessible to answer questions and troubleshoot on a daily basis, including weekends, from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

From July 1995 through December 1996, 128 of 331 eligible men and their partners participated in the Fathering Program at LA DWP. At that time, there were a total of 7075 male employees at LA DWP; it was estimated that approximately 3% of the male employees' wives gave birth every year. A diverse group of men participated in the Fathering Program (see Figure 1 for a representation of Fathering Program participants by race compared to distribution of race among LA DWP employees). Fifty percent of those who participated in the program were field or technical workers, 42% were engineers or professional workers, and 8% represented middle management. The average age of the men participating in the program was 36. Comparing the 6-month enrollment in 1995 to the 12-month enrollment in 1996, there was a 13% increase in the percentage of participation (40% vs. 35%) among all men whose partners had babies (Figure 2).

Infants of the fathers who participated in the Fathering Program breastfed for an average of 8 months. Only 4% of the infants stopped breastfeeding at 1 month of age or before. Sixty-nine percent of infants in the program were still breastfeeding at 6 months. Sixty-six percent of the female partners in the program were employed either part-time or full-time. It is not known how many female partners of male employees with infants who were not in the program breastfed and for how long. Breastfeeding was defined as any breastfeeding or expressed breast milk feeding.

Summary

The above description of the participants of the Fathering Program during July 1995 through December

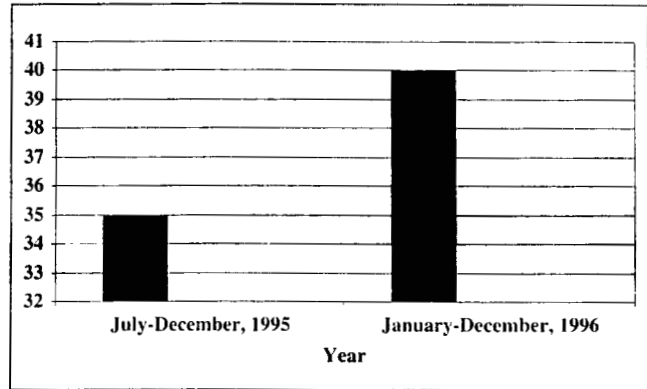


Figure 2. Percent of LA DWP fathers with new infants who participated in the lactation program.

Box 3. Barriers to Breastfeeding Support Program for Fathers

- Supervisor believes pregnancy and breastfeeding issues are for women only
- Supervisor refuses to allow the father to attend classes
- Coworkers tease the father about attending classes
- The educational site is not at the same location as the work site

1996 illustrates the viability and ultimate success of a breastfeeding support program that targets male employees in a corporate setting. The success is reflected in the participation rates of the male employees and the increase in participation between 1995 and 1996 (Figure 2). Through word of mouth and marketing to the male employees, the participation of the men in the predominately male employee population of LA DWP grew. In addition, the free breast pump rental, the men's partners, and the known benefits of breastfeeding for the infant attracted the men to the Fathering Program. This report demonstrates that male employees will use breastfeeding services in a corporate setting.

An essential ingredient for the Fathering Program's success is the support it receives from the management at LA DWP. The corporate management supports the Fathering Program through monetary support and by including it in the yearly strategic objectives for the company. This support has helped address a number of the work site barriers to breastfeeding (Box 3).

Of note, the average length of breastfeeding for all of the infants whose fathers participated in the program was 8 months; 69% of the women, a majority of them employed, were still breastfeeding at 6 months, well above the national average of 21.7% in 1996 (Figure 3).²³ Similar average breastfeeding duration rates (8.1 months) were found among the female employees

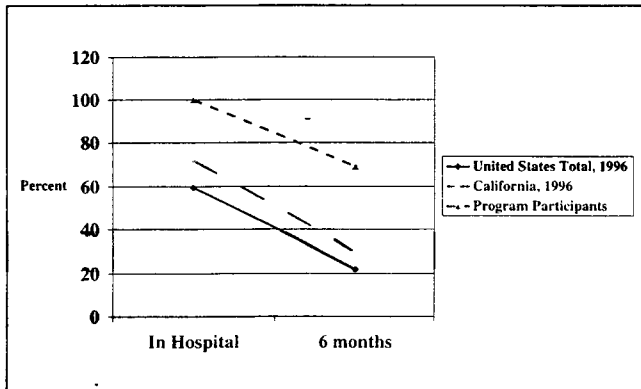


Figure 3. Average breastfeeding initiation and 6-month-duration rates among wives of program participants compared to California and National Averages (Ross Laboratories, 1998).

from LA DWP who participated in a corporation lactation program.¹⁹

Conclusion

Breastfeeding is the optimal infant-feeding method and is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics to be exclusive for the first 6 months of an infant's life and be continued for 1 year or more.²⁴ The experiences at LA DWP demonstrate the possibility of promoting breastfeeding among a group of men with diverse cultural, professional, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Through different marketing strategies, these men were attracted to the fathering program.

Employers should consider implementing breastfeeding support services not only for their female employees but also for their male employees. The literature demonstrates the advantages for the employer, the family, the infant, the mother, and society at large if breastfeeding is continued for 1 year or more.^{25,26} If an infant is exclusively breastfed for at least 3 months, a conservative estimate of \$331 to \$475 per infant will be saved because of reduced illness and, in turn, fewer health care expenses in the first year of life.²⁷ Moreover, if working mothers breastfeed their infants for 100 work days, 41% of infants never get sick in their first year of life compared to 10% of formula-fed infants whose mothers experience more than twice as much absenteeism as do the breastfeeding mothers in the first year of the infant's life.^{19,28} With more men participating in the care of their infants, men will also benefit from a healthier infant and miss less time from work due to their infants' illnesses. Fathers also benefit from formula and breast pump rental cost savings. An additional benefit

may be that the fathers who participate in the Fathering Program may be more supportive in the future of their female colleagues who choose to continue breastfeeding after returning to work.

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