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**STUDY SHOWS BREASTFEEDING GAP IN HOSPITALS
SERVING POOR ETHNIC WOMEN**

SACRAMENTO. A report issued today by the University of California at Davis Human Lactation Center and the California WIC Association (CWA) ranks nearly every hospital in the state in terms of the rate of new mothers who breastfeed while in the hospital. The analysis reveals stark differences in rates -- with a concentration of low-performing hospitals in Southern California counties -- and demonstrates that the breastfeeding gap is greatest in hospitals serving ethnic low-income mothers and babies. But the report goes on to show that, when hospitals improve their newborn feeding policies and practices, they dramatically increase their breastfeeding rates.

“Breastfeeding should not depend on where you are born. Our report shows that virtually all of the hospitals with the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates reported here serve low-income and minority women — the very population most affected by poor health outcomes such as diabetes and obesity”, says Karen Farley of CWA. “Where

hospitals are resistant to change, exclusive breastfeeding rates remain stagnant. It is imperative that these hospitals adopt and follow the California Department of Public Health guidelines.”

Based on recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization, the state guidelines describe the policies hospitals should be implementing to promote exclusive breastfeeding, which means babies are fed only breast milk, no other food or fluid. Authorities urge exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, because it can prevent a host of infant and maternal illnesses -- as well as childhood obesity.

The report’s findings are particularly compelling because in California, nearly 87 percent of all mothers in California start breastfeeding during their hospital stay, yet less than half leave the hospital exclusively breastfeeding. For example, at Coast Community Hospital, located in Orange County, 88.4 percent of women initiate breastfeeding at birth, and only 2.4 percent leave the hospital breastfeeding exclusively. “This is completely unacceptable,” states Pamela Pimentel, RN, CEO of MOMS Orange County. “We know what hospital policies work to support breastfeeding mothers and it is the responsibility of all hospitals to take action to implement those policies,” says Pimentel.

Southern California hospitals dominate the list of the 15 lowest scoring hospitals by exclusive breastfeeding. Pacific Alliance Medical Center, Pacifica Hospital of the Valley, Bellflower Medical Center, Los Angeles Metropolitan Medical Center, Valley Presbyterian Hospital, Beverly Hospital, St. Francis Medical Center, Garfield Medical Center, and California Hospital Medical Center, all located in Los Angeles County, are on the list. Other hospitals on the 15 lowest scoring hospitals list by exclusive breastfeeding are located in Orange, San Bernardino, and Kern Counties.

Hayward Kaiser Hospital in Alameda County, and Monterey Peninsula Community Hospital in Monterey County and Scripps Memorial Hospital Encinitas in San Diego are among the top 15 hospitals in the state in terms of exclusive breastfeeding rates.

In general, the highest-scoring hospitals by exclusive breastfeeding have

implemented policies and practices that support breastfeeding women, such as, training all staff in skills necessary to help breastfeeding women, making sure breastfeeding is started soon after the baby is born, giving breastfeeding newborns only breast milk while in the hospital unless there is a medical need for something else, eliminating formula marketing to their patients and allowing mom and baby to stay together and breastfeed whenever they want to do so.

San Francisco General is proof that policies matter when it comes to breastfeeding support. Even though nearly all of the 1,266 mothers giving birth there in 2007 were on Medi-Cal (government program that provides health coverage for low-income women), the hospital's exclusive breastfeeding rate was an impressive 88.9 percent. San Francisco General has institutionalized policies that make breastfeeding a priority. "With our recent initiative to become certified as a Baby-Friendly Hospital, we have improved our rates of sustained breastfeeding," says neonatologist Dr. Colin Partridge. "Along with all the benefits of breastfeeding, the initiative has led to a remarkable improvement in our support of family-centered, comprehensive care for mothers and children." The research shows when model policies and practices are implemented, exclusive breastfeeding rates increase. "It is amazing how the gap narrows when hospitals simply create an environment that truly supports women who want to breastfeed," said Farley.

The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages mothers to breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months, as it is the healthiest way to feed new babies and is clearly the preferred feeding method for most new mothers. Offering supplemental formula unnecessarily in the hospital can interfere with a mother's plan to breastfeed. "The first 48 hours after birth is a critical time for women who breastfeed, as it's during those first few days that milk production begins," noted Jane Heinig, Ph.D., IBCLC and Executive Director of UCD HLC. Heinig added, "While breastfeeding is a natural process, many new moms have difficulty getting started. In the past, female relatives living nearby helped women successfully initiate breastfeeding. Today, with most women giving birth in hospitals, the responsibility to give mothers that support has fallen to the medical profession. With supportive policies in place, staff can help new mothers of all

income levels and ethnicities to follow-through with their plans to breastfeed their babies.”

For information on ways to eliminate barriers to breastfeeding in the hospital setting and the model hospital policies and practices:

California Department of Public Health Breastfeeding Statistics:

<http://ww2.cdph.ca.gov/data/statistics/Pages/BreastfeedingStatistics.aspx>

Model Policies and Toolkit for Breastfeeding:

<http://ww2.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/healthyliving/childfamily/Pages/BreastfeedingandHealthyLiving.aspx>

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative:

<http://www.babyfriendlyusa.org/eng/index.html>

California WIC Association:

http://www.calwic.org/bfreport_2008.aspx to view the report and county fact sheets.

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