Making breastfeeding work at work

For many women, continuing to breastfeed when returning to work is seen as a challenge despite recommendations encouraging breastfeeding for as long as possible.

The theme of this year’s World Breastfeeding Week, August 1-7 is making breastfeeding work at work.

Sydney Local Health District is committed to fostering a supportive work environment for employees who are breastfeeding and has this week released a promotional video to encourage staff to understand the benefits of breastfeeding at work.

In addition, staff have been collecting entries for the best knitted breast, to be judged on August 7.

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital midwife and lactation specialist Carmel Kelly said breastfeeding shouldn’t been seen as a barrier to women wanting to return to work.

“Women often cite returning to work as the primary reason they stop breastfeeding. We are working to change this from being such a barrier by providing women with the support and reinforcement needed to allow them to express milk whilst working,” she said.

Alison Manurung, a child and family health nurse at Croydon Health Centre, continued to breastfeed her three sons (Harrison, 10, Lewis, 8 and Benjamin, 4) after returning to work each time and felt supported to do so.

“It is such a daunting thing to return to work and leave your baby with someone else,” she said. “When I expressed at work, I felt like I was still doing something for them in my work day, and not neglecting them.”

National Health and Medical Research Council and NSW Health guidelines recommend babies be breastfed exclusively for the first six months, and research shows that the longer a baby continues to breastfeed, even after the introduction of solids at six months, the better the health benefits to both mother and baby.
“When women are able to make breastfeeding work at work, everybody benefits. The mother benefits, for her own health and also feeling good about coming back to work. The baby’s health benefits, but employers benefit too because of increased retention rates, staff morale and less time off caring for a sick child,” Ms Kelly said.

The District has designated breastfeeding and expressing rooms and the policy allows for two paid half-hour lactation breaks within an eight hour shift for breastfeeding women.

More information about breastfeeding at work, including District policies and locations of all feeding rooms can be found at http://intranet.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/slhd/breastFeeding/Breastfeedingatwork.html

Alison’s advice when considering breastfeeding at work:

- Planning - speak to the carer of your child, and work out what is going to work best. Maybe they can bring the baby to you? Maybe you can go to them?
- Go to your workplace and plan where you are going to feed/pump, where you will store your milk, if you need electricity for the pump etc.
- Communicate effectively with your manager your expressing time needs, and how you will fit that into your work schedule.
- Communicate with the carer of your child to make sure they know what time you will be home so they don’t feed your baby just before you arrive home with full breasts.
- Keep going, because it doesn’t take long until you don’t have to express at work, but can continue breastfeeding, as your child will breastfeed just before you walk out the door, and when you walk back in the door, and then while you are together. They will eat food and drink water while you aren’t there.