

UCSD Medical Center Receives Prestigious International Baby-Friendly Designation

April 26, 2006

Jeffrey Itrich

The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center has received prestigious international recognition as a Baby-Friendly birth facility. The award recognizes birth facilities that actively encourage breastfeeding as the primary source of newborn nutrition. UCSD joins 52 U.S. hospitals and birth centers who have achieved the notable status.

UCSD received the award from Baby-Friendly USA, the U.S. authority for implementing the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), a global program sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). UCSD is only the second San Diego County hospital to receive the designation, following Scripps Encinitas.

"We are extremely pleased that UCSD Medical Center has received this important designation," said Richard Liekweg, CEO of UCSD Medical Center. "This is another demonstration of our commitment to providing state-of-the-art but high-touch care for our mothers and their babies. We are very proud of being able to bring this service to the community."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be breastfed without supplemental foods or liquids the first six months of life. An analysis by the National Institutes of Health showed a 21% lower all-cause infant mortality rate and a reduced risk of SIDS in breastfed babies. Breastfeeding has been shown to protect newborns against many diseases including ear infections, bowel disorders and respiratory illnesses. When babies are born their immature immune systems render them less able to fight illness-causing germs. Breast milk is a baby's first immunization and provides antibodies which protect a baby from many common diseases by increasing immunity.

The Surgeon General's Goal for Healthy People 2010 states that 75% of women should breastfeed their newborn infants at hospital discharge. The CDC reports that in San Diego County in 2004 85% of women breastfed at discharge. At UCSD 93% of discharged patients breastfeed their newborn infants.

Ever since Audrey Naylor, M.D. started the worldwide Baby-Friendly movement at UCSD more than 25 years ago when she began teaching nurses and physicians how to educate new mothers on the benefits of breastfeeding, UCSD has made a strong effort to encourage breastfeeding.

Since UCSD initiated Baby-Friendly practices patients have noticed a big difference as well.

"After the birth of my baby under UCSD's new Baby-Friendly approach," says patient Jennifer Moore, "I felt we were in the center of a quiet circle of respect and support from all staff at UCSD. Lactation consultants and nurses helped me refine my breastfeeding positions and techniques. I was given the same loving care, but was more in charge of what happened to me and my baby. The staff at UCSD understood the balance between hands-on support and allowing me time and space to learn about my new baby. We left the hospital an already bonded family."

Lisa Stellwagen, M.D., and Corey Anaka, RNC, IBCLC, Coordinator of Lactation Services, spearheaded the UCSD effort. Stellwagen says pursuing the Baby-Friendly designation required UCSD Medical Center to implement changes.

"Practice changes over the last few years such as delaying circumcision, postponing routine bathing and encouraging parents to hold their babies skin-to-skin right after childbirth have led to increased breastfeeding success," says Stellwagen.

Prior to Baby-Friendly babies born by cesarean section used to be taken from their mothers after birth, evaluated, and taken to the neonatal-intensive care unit (NICU). Now cesarean section babies are placed skin-to-skin with their mothers and do not go to the NICU unless it is medically necessary. Healthy infants at UCSD Medical Center now room-in 24 hours a day with their mothers.

If babies require care in the NICU mothers can breastfeed in the unit at the baby's bedside. For those NICU babies too premature or otherwise unable to breastfeed, their mothers can pump breast milk for nurses to feed their babies.

Anaka emphasizes the Baby-Friendly designation was made possible through an interdisciplinary effort. "We train all staff to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth and encourage them to exclusively breastfeed their babies," says Anaka. She adds that Baby-Friendly discourages pacifiers and bottle use and the hospital agrees not to accept free baby formula or promotional items from the formula manufacturers.

"However, we do purchase infant formula for infants who are not breastfed, have special medical conditions, or need additional supplementation," she says.

Neil Finer, M.D., UCSD Medical Center Chief of Neonatology points out that the designation has special significance within the University of California community. "We are particularly proud of this milestone. UCSD Medical Center is the first University of California hospital to receive the designation," says Finer. "In fact, we are the largest medical facility on the west coast to receive this important designation. We have always been committed to the support of breastfeeding for our mothers and babies and for the use of breast milk as the ideal nutrient for our premature and sick infants."

The process for receiving the prestigious designation was neither easy nor expeditious.

"This is extremely exciting for us; it's been a long time coming," says Audrey Naylor, M.D., of Wellstart. Naylor's early efforts eventually grew into a worldwide WHO initiative in 1991. To date more than 19,000 hospitals and birth centers in 125 countries have received Baby-Friendly status.

About UCSD Women and Infant Services Approximately 3,000 babies are born at UCSD Medical Center every year. UCSD Medical Center provides families with a variety of obstetrical and childbirth options -- more than any other medical center in San Diego. Among the services offered at UCSD Medical Center:

UCSD Medical Center is nationally recognized for its high risk pregnancy and delivery program for women with problem pregnancies at the Fetal Diagnosis and Treatment Center. The center brings together a multidisciplinary team to provide a coordinated approach from pre-conception through birth. Board certified maternal-fetal medicine specialists, medical geneticists, genetic counselors, radiologists and other specialists provide prenatal and genetic counseling regarding amniocentesis, CVS and ultrasound findings to patients and families.

New software and machinery developed by the UCSD School of Medicine enhances sonogram imagery, which enables medical professionals, as well as patients, to see and analyze complete, three-dimensional (3-D) pictures of a fetus. Viewing the 3-D image is unlike the two-dimensional "snowy" ultrasound photos. The pictures generated from 3-D ultrasound are clearer and enable physicians to more easily detect anomalies such as cleft palate, spina bifida and clubfeet.

UCSD Medical Center is the only facility in southern California to offer Fetal Surgery or minimally invasive in-utero fetal therapy to cure or reduce adverse outcomes resulting from fetal and placental conditions that may otherwise cause severe complications or long term, irreversible harm to the baby.

From a traditional labor and delivery environment to the home-like atmosphere of birthing rooms, from experienced nurse-midwives and doulas to some of the nation's top physicians and specialists, UCSD Medical Center offers choices for all types of births. The Labor & Delivery unit features labor, delivery and recovery (LDR) rooms and state-of-the-art surgical suites for Cesarean deliveries.

The only place of its kind in San Diego, the Birth Center located on the hospital's fourth floor enables mothers to experience a natural birth -- with minimal medical intervention -- within a hospital setting. A nationally recognized team of Certified Nurse Midwives provides care in five spacious birthing suites with double and queen size beds and rocking chairs, as well as a family room, a play area for children, and a parent resource library. If necessary, medical staff can quickly transfer a laboring mother to the Labor & Delivery unit for epidural anesthesia, or more intensive medical care.

The UCSD Hearts and Hands Doula Program is the only volunteer doula program to provide cost-free doulas, or birth assistants, to any woman in labor who requests a doula for the duration of her labor.

UCSD Medical Center is the only hospital in San Diego with both a regional NICU and a labor and delivery service in the same facility. The UCSD Infant Special Care Center, also known as the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), is a highly specialized, nationally recognized center of excellence providing the highest level of care available for up to 40 newborns.

The Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility offers a full range of state-of-the-art reproductive healthcare associated with a woman's ability to become pregnant, to have normal menstrual cycles and to benefit from appropriate treatment in postmenopausal life. Patients can receive treatment for infertility, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, amenorrhea, uterine fibroids and other conditions leading to infertility.

As an academic center, UCSD also conducts cutting edge clinical research. The Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility has been recognized by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of the National Institute of Health (NIH) as a center of excellence in reproductive sciences.

Media Contacts: Jeffree Itrich (619) 543-6163