

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NUTRITION ADVICE AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL PROVIDED AT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN CENTRAL SYDNEY

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The aim of this study was to investigate the nutrition advice and educational material provided at the Early Childhood (ECH) Centres in Central Sydney in order to provide appropriate nutrition inservice updates and resources for ECH Sisters and their clients. A study carried out in Western Australia on the advice given by child and community health nurses found that inappropriate advice was given on aspects of formula feeding, the treatment of diarrhoea, and the age at which cow's milk can be introduced (Coveney and Miller 1991).

The current nutrition advice given by the sisters was determined by observation and structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on current nutrition issues and frequently discussed topics raised during sister/client consultations. The nutrition education material was critiqued based on appropriateness to the target group, readability as calculated by the Fog Index (Flesch 1974), the content and design, and its overall usefulness. An overall rating of one to four stars was given for each publication.

One hundred and eleven nutrition discussions were held with the 103 clients. In 73% of the cases the topic of nutrition was initiated by the sister. An outline of food intake was taken for 22% of clients, while quantities were only discussed in 7% of these cases. Nutrition education material was given to 20% of the clients, the most commonly given publication was 'Feeding your New Baby - The First 12 Months' which is published by the NSW Department of Health.

The most appropriate advice given by the sisters was on breastfeeding and feeding 'fussy eaters'. Inappropriate or misleading advice included: the recommendation that extra protein (for example, the addition of egg yolk to solids) is required for infants between 7-12 months of age; that low iron formula can be used for infants of any age or for infants with constipation; that eliminating specific foods from the breastfeeding mother's diet will help overcome infantile colic; and recommending juice even if an infant had an adequate intake of fruit.

Ninety two nutrition education 'handouts', which included 20 photocopied pages and 70 publications, were collected from the 13 participating ECH centres. Much of the nutrition education material collected was outdated and irrelevant. The most commonly given out publication, 'Feeding Your New Baby - The First 12 Months' was rated lower in terms of overall usefulness than other available publications. The most appropriate were considered to be: 'Breastfeeding' (NSW Department of Health), 'Ready for Solids - A guide to the Introduction of Solid Foods for your Baby' (Boots Co. and Department of Family and Child Health, NSW) and 'The Good Food Guide - For Babies from Birth to 2 years' (Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Pty. Ltd.).

Recommendations from this study are: (a) Inservice updates for early childhood sisters would be helpful, on the introduction of solids, formula feeding and the appropriate treatments for wind/colic and constipation, and (b) Any nutrition education material intended for use at ECH centres should be critiqued by a paediatric dietitian and additional written material for the 2-5 year old age group should be available for parents.

COVENEY, J. and MILLER, M.R. (1991). *Austr. J. Nutr. Diet.* 48: 18.

FLESCH, R. (1974). 'The Art of Readable Writing' 25th ed (Harper & Row: New York)

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