Donor Breast Milk Acceptability in Muslim Populations in Canada

Nicole Clouthier, BScFN¹, Cindy Ulrich, RD², Dr. Brenda Hartman, PhD, RD¹
¹Brescia University College, Ontario ²London Health Sciences Center, Ontario

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- Human breast milk is the best nutritional option for all newborn infants and provides benefits that cannot be matched by formula use (1)
- When a woman delivers prematurely, she may experience difficulty establishing an adequate amount of breast milk for her baby (2)
- When mother’s own milk is unavailable or in short supply, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that pasteurized donor breast milk (DBM) should be used over preterm formula (3)
- DBM has been linked to improved outcomes in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) including lower rates of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) and infection and improved feeding tolerance (3-5)

MUSLIM IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

- Over 200 000 Muslims immigrated to Canada between 2006 – 2011, making up 3.2% of the Canadian population
- It is predicted Muslims will make up 5.6 – 7.2% of the Canadian population by the year 2036 (8)
- As the number of Muslims in Canada rises, the number of Muslim families in NICUs will likely also rise

HUMAN MILK BANKING IN CANADA

- The collection, processing and distribution of donor human milk in North America is regulated by The Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA)
- After screening, the milk from up to 5 women is pooled together and pasteurized according to the Holder method (63°C for 30 minutes) (6)
- Research has shown that many living in Muslim countries do not support the use of pooled DBM, and milk can only be donated when the identity of the donor is known (7)

MILK KINSHIP

- A bond created between a breast milk donor and the child receiving the milk, where the child essentially becomes a surrogate child of the donor, creating a siblingship between the recipient child and any other children born by the donor mother
- This prohibits future marriage between any of these children (9)
- This may prevent Muslims living in the West from accepting DBM due to the anonymity of the donor

METHODS

- Three databases; PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science; were reviewed for pertinent articles
- Key words included in search strategy included *Donor Breast Milk, Muslim, Islam, Acceptability, Preterm, Premature Birth, NICU*
- A total of 12 articles were included in the final review after screening abstracts and full-text
- Reference lists of included articles were reviewed for additional sources

DONOR BREAST MILK ACCEPTABILITY

- A fatwa is a ruling on a subject in Islamic law (10)
- The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), a council developed to address issues faced by Muslims living in Western countries, released a fatwa on DBM use in 2004
- According to the ECFR, DBM use does not establish milk kinship for the following reasons:
 1. Feeding through a tube or bottle (as opposed to at the breast) is not close enough of contact between the baby and donor
 2. The identity of the donor mother and the quantity of milk donated is unknown
 3. A complete fulfilling feed is not provided to the infant from one donor, as the milk from as many as 5 women is pooled
 4. DBM use provides increased benefit and decreased hardship when compared to formula use (11)

STRATEGIES AND RELEVANCE TO CANADIAN PRACTICE

- Clinicians need to take proactive measures by offering the families of Muslim preterm infants with information on DBM before birth whenever possible
- Production of educational resources in English and Arabic can facilitate obtaining informed consent for DBM provision
- Staff from Neonatal Intensive Care Units can work with Muslim religious officials in the community to ensure consistent messaging regarding DBM is being communicated
- It is important for clinicians to be aware of potential religious beliefs that may impact their practice, given the growing Canadian Muslim population
- New Muslim immigrants may not have assimilated to the Canadian viewpoint on DBM use
- Muslim families may not have sought out information regarding DBM use, as this information may not have been valuable to them prior to having a preterm infant
- Canadian clinicians can help educate their patients on DBM and how it is a safer alternative to formula when mother’s own milk is unavailable

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