

# **IBCLC Lactation Consultant \***

## **A relatively new professional group in medicine**

\* International Board Certified Lactation Consultant

**Article which appeared in the Hamburger Ärzteblatt 12/98** (with updated numbers from 12/2007)

Over the course of time, opinions and attitudes on the topic of “breastfeeding” have changed multiple times. Originally it went without saying that babies would be breastfed because there was no reliable alternative. Then, came the triumphal advance of ever better industrially prepared infant formula. Feeding from the breast was supplanted by bottle feeding, which was welcomed by many parents as well as medical personnel. Today a certain change in attitude is emerging in our society and in medical professional circles. Many studies and much scientific research document that both the physical and emotional health of infants is promoted by breastfeeding and that these effects are detectable into adulthood.

In Scandinavian countries – where the breastfeeding rate has, in the meantime, become quite high – it has been shown that the education of new parents alone does not help to increase the duration of breastfeeding. More is required: good conditions as well as individual counsel and support over the entire course of the breastfeeding relationship. When breastfeeding problems occur, it is mostly the gynecologists or pediatricians in private practice who are consulted. However the professional education of the various health care personnel (midwives, nurses and physicians) has very little practical information and even less scientific background on the range of problems associated with breastfeeding and lactation. Due to insufficient teaching content in this area, the causes for breastfeeding problems may frequently not be recognized quickly or resolved with the help of effective guidance. In addition, the time available to these professional groups often does not permit such a counseling effort. Supplementing the already-existing institutions and services, lactation consultants are a contact point for the questions and problems connected with breastfeeding and lactation. They can also fill the gap that still exists between gynecology and pediatrics. They offer professionally competent and sensitive counsel which takes into account the individual wishes and needs of mother and child.

Lactation consultants have completed a comprehensive training program. Concluding it is an exam given by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE), an expert group in the area of breastfeeding from a variety of health care professions. A condition for acceptance into the training program is the completion of education in a medical or auxiliary profession as well as 1800 practice hours in breastfeeding counseling or several years caring for mothers and children or a license as a physician and 1200 practice hours in breastfeeding counseling.

Further education to become a lactation consultant involves comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge of all aspects of lactation, which has been, up to now, only partially transmitted by the specialist areas of gynecology, pediatrics, allergy, psychology etc. The areas of competency for these professions remain unchanged. However, within the framework of comprehensive care, good cooperation should be possible. On-going continuing education is the condition for maintaining the qualification. This involves the organization of information days, professional conferences and continuing education events. These offer scientifically sound information about breastfeeding.

The areas of responsibility as a hospital-based lactation consultant lie in the maternity unit, neonatology and the newborn intensive care unit. In private practice they are in ambulatory care or with the mothers at home – in cases where home visits are requested. This continuing education makes it possible to develop an individual plan, alongside the medical care, especially in problem situations such as maternal or infant illness, premature birth, multiple births, handicapped children or insufficient weight gain – that ensures the possibility of breastfeeding or mother’s milk feeding. The emotional support of the mother in her relationship to the baby is always in the foreground. In

addition to this, the work of a lactation consultant includes continuing education for physicians, midwives, nursing staff, nutritionists and staff in parent-child centers, among other areas. They draw up breastfeeding standards and participate in the implementation of the WHO and UNICEF "Baby-Friendly Hospital" concept on maternity units.

Breastfeeding is a complex process and it is not a good idea for each profession to limit itself only to those aspects that are important for its own field. Different continuing education programs for the different professional groups with different – or no – exams would not result in unified standards. Competency certification must be related to the area as a whole, which includes many details. Hospitals are now also required to support women in breastfeeding. Over and over again mothers are made to feel unsure – even in the early days after a birth - because of differing advice. Even in the time of limited budgets, savings should not be made here. In the end it also a benefit for the health insurance funds that breastfed children are ill less frequently compared to non-breastfed children

At present (December 2007), there are about 19,000 IBCLC lactation consultants world-wide of which there are some 3,370 in all of Europe. The term "lactation consultant, IBCLC" is protected by the Patent Office in Germany. The German Lactation Consultants' Association, IBCLC, Inc. (BDL) owns this trademark and only permits its use by International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC). Currently there are 1072 IBCLC lactation consultants in Germany, the majority of whom are members of BDL. The European umbrella organization is the "European Lactation Consultants' Association, Inc. (VELB). This organization offers professional conferences and a professional journal and, through the European Institute for Breastfeeding and Lactation, physicians' seminars, seminars to prepare for the IBLCE exam, basic seminars and symposia. Every year in July, many new candidates take the exam. Mothers and babies profit from having professionals with all the requisite skills and knowledge in the area of breastfeeding and lactation.

The German Lactation Consultants' Association (BDL) [www.bdl-stillen.de](http://www.bdl-stillen.de) would be pleased to provide you with more information on continuing education as would the European Lactation Consultants' Association (VELB) [www.velb.org](http://www.velb.org).

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P.S.:

*Since publication by the EU Project on Breastfeeding Promotion of "Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding in Europe: An Action Plan", developed and written by the participants in the project, Promotion of Breastfeeding in Europe ( (EU Project Contract N. SPC 2002359,) the IBLCE exam is considered world-wide to be the standard of continuing education for medical personnel in the area of breastfeeding and lactation:.* Download

[www.stillen.org/english/aboutus/international-projects.html](http://www.stillen.org/english/aboutus/international-projects.html)