

## Webcast #4: Scope of Practice



- Welcome to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service webcast on the scope of practice for peer counselors. I'm Patti Mitchell with the Food and Nutrition Service WIC Program. This is webcast #4 from our series of webcasts from the FNS Peer Counseling curricula: Loving Support Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together.
  - Peer counseling provides an important adjunct to the usual WIC program services.
  - The WIC local agency CPA or other appropriate staff conducts the assessments and provide appropriate education and referrals to lactation professionals as necessary.
  - Peer counselors supplement, but do not replace, the work of CPAs and lactation professionals.
  - Peer counselors can help fill gaps in service. They can devote the time to help mothers explore their barriers and concerns, and they are available outside the usual clinic hours. And they provide that unique WIC mother to WIC mother support that really adds to the breastfeeding services that WIC offers.
  - A peer counselor's scope of practice is to provide basic information and support to new moms. And they make referrals when they experience problems beyond their training.
  - The webcast will provide a summary of key highlights from Section 6 of the management curriculum on scope of practice for peer counselors. It's not possible to go through the entire module in this webcast, so we'd like to remind you to please refer to the *detailed* speaker notes and handouts for this section. State agencies will need to use the information provided in the detailed speaker notes to develop their policies and also to train their local agency managers.

**[show Every Mother slide]**

I am going to turn over the next portion of the webcast to Cathy Carothers from Every Mother, Inc. who will go through a summary of key points of the curriculum on scope of practice.

79



## Peer Counselors Fill the Gap

Peer counselors help fill the gap in services. They:

Provide prenatal breastfeeding promotion and support, timing messages to issues mothers are most concerned about..

Connect them to other health programs and services that can help during pregnancy and beyond.

Prepare a mother for what to expect in the first few hours and days of breastfeeding and encourage her to attend prenatal classes.

Call or visit mothers in the hospital to help them troubleshoot early concerns.

Follow up when they are home from the hospital and make referrals to lactation experts if needed.

Provide ongoing support as the baby grows

80



## How Peer Counselors Help: Pregnancy

Peer counselors can provide additional value to the usual prenatal counseling services in WIC. They explore a mother's individual barriers to breastfeeding that are likely to change as her pregnancy unfolds.

Peer counselors help mothers explore options for maximizing the benefits of breastfeeding and lowering the mother's barriers.

Peer counselors inform mothers about basic breastfeeding technique. They help them get a good start with breastfeeding in the hospital, and give them tips for assuring a good milk production.

Peer counselors make referrals to WIC staff and the WIC Designated Breastfeeding Expert if problems continue or are beyond the peer counselor scope of practice.

81



## Contacting WIC Moms

Research shows higher breastfeeding rates with high intensity peer support initiatives that include contacts early in pregnancy and more frequent contacts as the due date approaches.<sup>1</sup>

82

## How Peer Counselors Help: The Early Days

<sup>1</sup> Chapman, 2010.



During the early first few days postpartum, peer counselors are an invaluable link to help and support new mothers.

When phone calls and visits to the hospital are allowed, peer counselors help mothers with some of these early concerns. They offer support and make appropriate referrals to a lactation consultant or another health care provider.

## 83



### Contacting WIC Moms

Research supports frequent contacts with new mothers in the early days:

Every 2-3 days in the first week or so.

Within 24 hours if the mother reports problems with breastfeeding.

Research shows that the most critical weaning window is the first week.<sup>2</sup>

This is the time when many mothers feel vulnerable and unsure of themselves.

Peer counselors are a lifeline to new mothers during this critical weaning period. They help mothers know whether their baby is truly getting enough and yield her immediately if she is struggling. They offer her encouragement and support to continue breastfeeding during this transition period.

## 84



### How Peer Counselors Help: The First Month

#### Key Talking Points:

Peer counselors can continue to offer ongoing help and support throughout the critical first month.

During the first month mothers are establishing milk production and adjusting to the new demands of motherhood and breastfeeding.

This is an ideal time for peer counselors to promote the WIC food packages for exclusively breastfeeding mothers and to answer the many questions mothers have.

They can help mothers gain confidence in their milk production, and encourage them if family members and friends are not supportive.

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<sup>2</sup> Ertem, 2001.

86



## Contacting WIC Moms

Contacts with new mothers should continue frequently during the first month:

Weekly after breastfeeding is going smoothly.

Within 24 hours if mothers experience problems.

Frequent, regular contacts will help mothers gain confidence they are doing well. They also allow peer counselors to address changing situations that may affect the mother's perceptions about how breastfeeding is going.

87



## How Peer Counselors Help: Beyond the First Month

After the first month, mothers continue to have questions and concerns as the baby grows. Peer counselors can continue to offer ongoing help and support. This includes helping mothers address questions about working breastfeeding into their life.

If mothers are returning to work or school, peer counselors can encourage them to continue breastfeeding, offer breast pumps, and help mothers find creative solutions.

They can help mothers deal with common challenges. These include breastfeeding in public and managing a nursing baby with other activities, and dealing with challenges of older babies such as starting solid foods and teething.

Peer counselors can promote the WIC food packages and make referrals to WIC by reminding mothers to keep their WIC appointments.

They also connect mothers to other mothers in the community for support.

88



## Contacting WIC Moms

Beyond the first month, peer counselors in most successful programs initiate calls or contacts with new mothers:

Monthly, as long as things are going well.

Around 1-2 weeks before the mother plans to return to work or school and a day or two after she returns.

89



## Peer Counselor Job Description

WIC programs with successful peer counseling programs generally agree that peer counselors are most helpful in providing basic breastfeeding information and support to WIC mothers.

The sample job description outlines basic activities for peer counselors. This includes counseling mothers, documenting contacts, making referrals, attending staff meeting, growing her own knowledge about breastfeeding, and functioning as a part of the WIC team.

90



## Basic Scope of Practice

The peer counselor scope of practice is limited to supporting normal breastfeeding. This means providing basic information and support, including:

- Performing in a professional manner in all aspects of her role.
- Encouraging and supporting mothers to breastfeed.
- Teaching basic breastfeeding to WIC mothers.
- Supporting mothers when difficulties occur.
- Yielding to breastfeeding experts.

The peer counselor training, "*Loving Support*© Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together – for Training WIC Peer Counselors," addresses the basic information and support role for peer counselors and shows peer counselors situations which must be yielded to breastfeeding experts.

Local WIC agencies should not expect peer counselors to provide services beyond their basic scope of practice. Instead, WIC staff who are health professionals should be trained in breastfeeding management to assist with problem management. Breastfeeding experts should be identified within the local clinic/agency and community.

91

## When to Yield



Peer counselors should refer situations that are beyond their training or comfort level. This includes common problems that do not begin improving within 24 hours of the intervention, or when there are medical situations for the mother or infant. The referral concept used in this curriculum is called “Yielding.”

This is a reminder that some situations require a peer counselor to smoothly “hand off” or “yield” a mother to more experienced professionals.

“Staffing and Supervision 7: When to Yield” lists general situations addressed in the peer counseling curriculum that normally should be yielded to lactation experts or health care providers. This is not an exhaustive list. A situation that a peer counselor finds uncomfortable, or one that lies outside her scope of basic information and support, should be yielded.



## Documenting Contacts

Documenting all contacts with mothers is an integral part of the peer counselor’s job duties. Documentation provides:

Peer counselors usually keep a contact log for each mother they follow. They document all contacts, information covered, and referrals made. The “Narrative Notes” section allows them to record more details about the encounter and to note any referrals made.

Peer counselors are responsible for securing all documentation. This includes both hard copy forms they complete manually and information recorded electronically. The mother’s private information must always be kept confidential and protected.

95

## Job Duties for Senior Peer Counselors



Each agency will need to determine policies for advancing a peer counselor to a senior position. Job duties can include:

- Assisting with training new peer counselors.
- Assisting with mentoring new peer counselors.
- Teaching classes and support group meetings with WIC mothers.
- Receiving referrals of situations that do not require yielding to the WIC designated breastfeeding expert.
- Issuing electric or manual breast pumps.
- Maintaining breast pump inventory.
- Making home visits.
- Providing hospital visits with new mothers.

96



### **Job Duties for Lactation Consultants**

IBCLCs are credentialed in lactation and require continuing education, hours of practice counseling mothers, and successful completion of the IBCLC exam.

A credentialed lactation consultant working in the WIC peer counseling program is able to provide more high-risk assistance to mothers. This includes managing problems beyond the scope of peer counselors.

IBCLCs follow their professional Scope of Practice developed by the credentialing organization, the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners.

With a tiered program, peer counselors who become IBCLCs may also assume some of these duties.

- Referral source for mothers experiencing problems with breastfeeding beyond the scope of basic and senior peer counselors.

- Making rounds at local hospitals.

- Making home visits with new mothers experiencing difficulties with breastfeeding.

- Issuing breastfeeding devices for more complex breastfeeding situations.

- Serving as the WIC Designated Breastfeeding Expert in the clinic or agency.

- Training, mentoring, and supervising peer counselors.

97

### **Recommendations for Career Path Program**



Recommendations that can help ensure success:

Encourage forward movement only when you can provide positions.

Hire peer counselors as entry level staff before moving them into other more advanced roles so they are familiar with the various positions.

Establish a defined job description and scope of practice and pay rate for each level.

Be careful not to become too “top heavy” with advanced level peer counselors and lactation consultants or the program will lose the important paraprofessional nature of mother-to-mother support.

**Now, I'd like to turn this webcast back over to Patti Mitchell at FNS for final comments.**

**Patti:**

Thank you Cathy.

- Again, today's webcast was a brief summary of key highlights of Section 6 of the management curriculum. I remind you to please refer to the detailed speaker notes and all of the resources available to you in the management curriculum. You can find these materials on the WIC Works Resource System.
- We hope you found this webcast useful, thank you for listening. And thank you for all you do for peer counselors and WIC mothers.

