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## Influence of a lactation counseling program on feeding practices in premature infants with <2000 g birth weight

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**Background:** In line with current recommendations, breastfeeding should be made a public health priority. This is particularly important in the case of preterm newborns in whom breastfeeding was shown to provide documented survival and health benefits.

**Aim:** The main aim of study was to establish the influence of a lactation counseling program, introduced in 2007, on feeding practices in premature infants hospitalized at Department of Neonatology and Neonatal Intensive Care, Medical University of Białystok, Poland.

**Methods:** The study included a total of 320 neonates and their mothers. The retrospective part included 154 newborns born prematurely in 2005-2006, and the prospective part 166 preterm newborns hospitalized at in 2011-2012. All mothers of neonates born in 2011-2012 were covered by the lactation counseling program. Follow-up data, inter alia information about the course of lactation, feeding method and child's health status, were collected at monthly intervals.

**Results:** Exclusively, breast feeding during hospitalization was 62% where preterm born in 2011-2012 and 35% born in the years 2005-2006, formula feeding was 13% and 31% respectively. At three and six months of age, only mother's milk-fed was 61% and 30% of premature babies born in 2011-2012 respectively. this was practiced by up to 90.5% of the mothers.

**Conclusions:** The findings demonstrate that introduction of breastfeeding standards may result in a significant increase in the proportion of premature infants fed exclusively with mother's milk.