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Oral Development and Breastfeeding: An Assessment of the Lactation Care Provider Approach

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Oral Development and Breastfeeding: An Assessment of the Lactation Care Provider Approach

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to assess lactation care provider’s perception, attitude and behavior on the relationship between breastfeeding and oral development; including oral malocclusion, breathing patterns, tethered oral tissues and dental caries.

Methods: A survey was created through REDCap. The survey was disseminated to members of The United States Lactation Consultant Association. The survey contained multiple-choice questions and asked the lactation care providers about their training, patient discussions and interactions, and perceptions. Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate each question.

Results: A total of 12 members participated in the survey. Of that, 11 were International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) and 1 was a Non-IBCLC. The results determined that lactation care providers have resources available to them that describe the relationship between breastfeeding and oral development. However, it was unclear whether they receive training on this during their initial training while earning their credentials. Lactation care providers discuss this relationship with their patients more than 50% of the time and state they feel comfortable discussing this relationship. This level of comfort could describe why lactation care providers refer to dental professionals less than 50% of the time. Although, lactation care providers perceive breastfeeding to positively influence the infant’s oral development.

Conclusion: Lactation care providers are often times one of the first professionals to provide oral health information to the mother/child pair. While there are resources available to LCPs on the relationship between oral development and breastfeeding it is unclear how they receive their training. However, lactation care providers report discussing this relationship with their patients during their interactions and feel comfortable in doing so. Lactation care providers also report they do not refer to dental professionals on a regular basis even though they perceive breastfeeding to positively influence oral development. This study supports the need for an interprofessional collaboration between dental professionals and lactation care providers.