

## Breast Feeding Good for baby, good for Mom

Ask a new or expectant mother what is foremost on her mind, and questions about breastfeeding will likely come up. "Can I breastfeed? Should I breastfeed? Will it be too much trouble? What if I can't provide enough milk for my baby?"

The nursing staff in Baystate Franklin Medical Center's obstetrics department, The Birthplace, are ready with the answers and encouragement. As a result, 82% of moth-



Suzanne Stoneham, RNC, IBCLC, Certified Lactation Consultant, with Mariah Meehan and her new baby, Thaydin in The Birthplace at Baystate Franklin Medical Center

ers giving birth there choose to breastfeed their infants.

"Breastfeeding is the natural and healthiest way to feed a baby," said Suzanne Stoneham, RNC, IBCLC, a Certified Lactation Consultant at Baystate Franklin Medical Center. "We are mammals; and female mammals are designed to breastfeed, while baby mammals are born with the instincts and skills necessary to breastfeed." Though breastfeeding is natural, it is all new to first time moms, so they need reassurance and a sense of what to expect until mother and baby are both fully at ease with the process.

"The key to a successful breastfeeding relationship is support, and we offer that support from the moment a woman receives the first official word that she is pregnant," said Linda West, RN, MSN, manager of The Birthplace. "We work closely with our midwives, obstetricians and pediatricians, all of whom are strong advocates of breastfeeding."

Once a woman comes to The Birthplace to deliver, she is surrounded by trained lactation resource nurses who are ready to offer help and encouragement. These nurses take refresher classes yearly to learn about the latest research and techniques in breastfeeding. "We are all on the same page here, and any one of us is capable of helping a mom who needs assistance breastfeeding her baby," Stoneham explained.

Linda Jablonski, RNC, MSN, assistant nurse manager of The Birthplace, said, "We promote a very baby-friendly atmosphere here, and call our technique 'Listening to Newborns.' We base our care on what's naturally best for the baby; and breastfeeding is top priority. When a baby is born, we place it skin to skin on its mother's chest, encouraging both breastfeeding and bonding. We also encourage mothers to keep their babies in the room with them at all times. That way, a mom can really start to learn her baby's habits and can respond naturally to the baby's needs."

Lab tests and examinations by the pediatrician can also be done right in the mother's room. Many Birthplace infants never even visit the nursery. As Jablonski noted, "When we have tours for children, we usually have to 'borrow' a baby from its mother to put in the nursery for the children to view!"

The Birthplace offers a Breastfeeding Class for pregnant women, during which many of the common concerns and misconceptions about breastfeeding are addressed. "We teach women about good nutrition, rest, relaxation, getting enough liquids - all elements that promote successful breastfeeding," said Jablonski. Once a mother gives birth, she can get assistance from any of the nurses; and she can also ask for a consultation with Stoneham.

"Sometimes, if a mom is having trouble getting started, I can help her find a more conducive position, or just reassure her that it's normal for her infant to want to nurse more often during the first two weeks," added Stoneham. "It's mostly about assuring her that she's doing fine as she gains confidence in her new role as a mom."

The support doesn't end when mothers leave the hospital; they are welcome to call Stoneham or any of the nursing staff if they have questions. "We also have a very popular Breastfeeding Support Group every Wednesday, at 11 am in The Birthplace," Jablonski explained. "Any woman who is breastfeeding, regardless of whether she had her baby at Baystate Franklin, is welcome to come to the group. We love Wednesdays, when all the moms show up with their infants and strollers. They often develop new friendships, and have a ready-made, long-term support system."

"I think with some women there's a misconception that breastfeeding is more work than bottle-feeding," Stoneham said. "True, breastfeeding does take effort on both the baby's and the mother's part. We just remind moms that, once they get through the first couple of weeks, they'll be rewarded knowing they have given their babies a healthy start, and have established a unique kind of bond that will help set the pace for a joyous mother-infant relationship."