March 30, 2012

Dear Chief Executive,

We strongly urge you to immediately discontinue the distribution of commercial infant formula manufacturer discharge bags in your facility. Many health care institutions are now scrutinizing the ethics and safety of commercial marketing and distribution of pharmaceutical products within their facilities; distribution of commercial discharge bags marketing infant formula is similarly unethical and contrary to good public health policy.

There is overwhelming consensus among all major health professional organizations regarding the health benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies and the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. Hospital promotion of infant formula through dissemination of these discharge bags contravenes this consensus, needlessly and inexcusably harming babies and families. Moreover, formula feeding imposes a significant burden on the nation’s economy. Breastfeeding saves families and the economy countless dollars.

When hospitals distribute formula samples, they participate in the marketing efforts of formula companies at the expense of patients. Moreover, by distributing samples, they imply that these products are medically approved and recommended. Yet, there is ample evidence that formula samples reduce breastfeeding duration and exclusivity. Multiple studies have shown that women who receive commercial hospital discharge packs stop breastfeeding sooner than those who do not. Hospitals expend resources to support mothers to breastfeed, but reduce the impact of these efforts by distributing formula samples. Research shows that bag distribution sends a message more powerful than any verbal messages. New mothers who at first experience difficulty breastfeeding are apt to choose to use free formula samples given to them in discharge bags instead of seeking out assistance with breastfeeding. Aware of these dangers, in 1981 the WHO established the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. The Code states that healthcare facilities are not to be used for the marketing of infant formula. Hospitals in the U.S. that continue to distribute formula samples are in violation of the WHO Code.

Your hospital aims to promote the health of infants and mothers, but the ongoing promotion of infant formula conflicts with this mission. In 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s mPINC study found that 34.2 percent of hospitals nation-wide had stopped distributing formula samples. This was an increase from 2007, when only 27.4 percent of hospitals had discontinued the sample bags. Recently, Rhode Island became the first state where
all birthing hospitals have banned the distribution of formula samples. This is important progress but far from sufficient. We urge your hospital to join those hospitals that refuse to act as marketing agents for formula companies. We look forward to your response, and would be pleased to discuss these matters with you further.

Sincerely,

Robert Weissman
President, Public Citizen

On behalf of:

National Organizations
Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine
American Academy of Nursing
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American Medical Student Association
American Public Health Association
Association of State & Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
Ban the Bags
The Best for Babes Foundation, Inc.
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Coalition for Improving Maternity Services
Consumers Union
Every Mother, Inc.
Food and Water Watch
HealthConnect One
Healthy Children Project, Center for Breastfeeding
Human Milk Banking Association of North America
International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners
La Leche League International
Lamaze International
MomsRising
National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy
National Congress of Black Women, Inc.
National Physicians Alliance
National WIC Association
National Women's Health Network
Our Bodies, Ourselves
Prevention Institute
Public Health Law & Policy
Shape Up America!
United States Breastfeeding Committee
United States Lactation Consultant Association
Wellstart International

State Organizations
Alabama Breastfeeding Committee
Arizona Breastfeeding Coalition
Breastfeeding Center of Pittsburgh
Breastfeeding Coalition of Oregon
Breastfeeding Coalition of the Uniformed Services
Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington
Breastfeeding Initiative
California Breastfeeding Coalition
California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute
Central Louisiana Breastfeeding Coalition
Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates
Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition
Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition
District of Columbia Breastfeeding Coalition
Eastern Kentucky Breastfeeding Coalition
Florida Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.
Georgia Breastfeeding Coalition
Guam Breastfeeding Coalition
Regional and Local Organizations

Acadiana Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.  
Cambridge/Somerville WIC  
Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children, Children's Memorial Hospital  
Greater Hudson Valley Family Health Center, Inc. WIC Program  
Greater Miami Valley Breastfeeding Coalition  
Lactation Study Center, University Of Rochester  
La Leche League of Charlottesville, VA  
La Leche League of Northern Dutchess  
La Leche League of Yonkers, New York  
La Leche of Marine Park, Madison  
Lorain County Breastfeeding Coalition  
Luzerne County Breastfeeding Coalition  
Maternity Care Coalition  
Mid-Hudson Lactation Consortium  
Missoula City-County Health Department  
Missoula Montana WIC  
Northeast Georgia Breastfeeding Coalition  
Northern Ohio Lactation Association  
Oswego County Breastfeeding Coalition  
Pennsylvania Mid-state Lactation Coalition  
Permian Basin Breastfeeding Coalition  
San Antonio Breastfeeding Coalition  
Shelby County Breastfeeding Coalition  
South Eastern Lactation Consultants Association  
South Sound Breastfeeding Network  
Western Pennsylvania Lactation Consultants Association

Notes


