



National WIC Association  
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April 3, 2009

The Editor

**The Atlantic**

The Watergate

600 New Hampshire Ave, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Editor:

**The National WIC Association (NWA)** writes in response to Hanna Rosin's provocative, misplaced article entitled "The Case Against Breastfeeding" in the April edition of The Atlantic Monthly. **NWA** is the nonprofit voice of the over 9 million mothers and young children and the over 12,200 service provider agencies and clinics of the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC).

In her article, Ms. Rosin expressed a biased opinion about breastfeeding as seen from her view of the world. She categorized her obstetrician's waiting room as "the upper-class parents' jungle;" and proceeded to demean lactation consultants by saying scornfully that "this is an actual profession." Further, she portrayed breastfeeding as a burdensome inconvenience and a form of imprisonment rather than the best gift a mother can give her baby.

Ms. Rosin's dismissal of valid, well-founded, well-designed scientific research and subsequent public health recommendations is baseless. During her research, she overlooked numerous compelling scientific articles in support of breastfeeding. The most recent ones include:

- "Breastfeeding and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in Developed Countries." 2007. A 171-page meta-analysis of the research on human milk prepared by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- "Second Expert Report: Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective" 2007. The World Cancer Research Fund/ American Institute for Cancer Research.
- "Does Breastfeeding Reduce the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?" 2009, Pediatrics: 123; e406-e410.

*WIC for a Healthier America*

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In Ms. Rosen's article, she talked about her friends becoming frantic when they could not breastfeed their first born. True inability to breastfeed occurs in less than 5% of the female population. The more common cause is the lack of support for women to breastfeed in the U.S. The *Mortality and Morbidity Report*, published by the Centers for Disease Control in June 2008, indicates that many of the practices in our hospitals, for example, "are not supportive of breastfeeding." Without support mothers become frustrated, feel guilty and resentful of a "system" they perceive as indifferent to their desire and efforts to breastfeed.

A recent Pediatrics article states that many of the women surveyed stop breastfeeding before three months postpartum. The most common reasons given are insufficient milk or the baby would not latch on to the nipple. These results suggest that the lack of lactation education might have contributed to what were viewed as obstacles by these women. "Breastfeeding interventions [for new mothers] should focus on lactational and nutritional counseling during their postpartum hospitalization and shortly after they are discharged." (2008, Fein, SB, et al, 112(s2); s69-s76, *Pediatrics*). Yet this support is rarely available for new mothers.

Compounding the many barriers that postpartum women have to overcome, is the lack of a culture of support for new mothers in the United States. Workplace support for breastfeeding or pumping milk is still in its infancy stage, and breastfeeding mothers are told to leave stores, shopping malls, restaurants, airplanes, and public gatherings despite laws in thirty states that prohibit these discriminatory acts.

The **National WIC Association** recognizes the need for new mothers to receive the breastfeeding education and support they deserve and has worked hard to assure that WIC mothers are afforded them. Ms. Rosin's one-sided opinion is a serious disservice to women who may be convinced to forgo the significant health, social, and environmental benefits associated with breastfeeding in exchange for "freedom."

**NWA** and breastfeeding advocates have worked diligently to create a culture of support for breastfeeding and to support a woman's choice to breastfeed. It is our hope that every individual, including the media, assist in cultivating that culture of support for breastfeeding and work to assure that our children get the healthy, critical start in life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Page Saunders". The script is fluid and cursive.

Margaret P. Saunders, MS, RD, LDN  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas A. Greenaway". The script is highly stylized and cursive.

The Rev. Douglas A. Greenaway  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol E. Peterson". The script is cursive and elegant.

Carol E. Peterson, MS, IBCLC, RLC  
Chair, NWA Breastfeeding Committee