SITE VISIT: Breastfeeding Promotion in Honduras—The PROALMA Project

PROALMA (Proyecto de Apoyo a la Lactancia Materna) is an example of a successful, urban, breastfeeding-promotion project. The primary goal of the project is to change health professionals' knowledge and attitudes about breastfeeding and to encourage hospital policies and practices to promote breastfeeding. Among the objectives of the project are these: adoption of a national breastfeeding promotion policy and maternal/infant nutrition norms by Honduran Government agencies; development and distribution by PROALMA of educational materials for both health professionals and the general public on maternal/infant nutrition and parental bonding; training courses, seminars, and workshops, offered by PROALMA, to teach health workers theory and practice of maternal/infant nutrition; adoption of hospital procedures supportive of breastfeeding and maternal/infant bonding; establishment of a clearinghouse in the national teaching hospital for information concerning breastfeeding and parental/infant bonding; and adoption of plans for the institutionalization of breastfeeding promotion activities in hospitals and health clinics after completion of the project.

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, PROALMA was initiated in 1982 as a joint project involving the Ministry of Public Health, the National Social Security Institute, and the National Social Welfare Agency. The project initially focused its efforts on three hospitals serving urban populations in two cities. At each hospital, PROALMA staff trained health professionals on breastfeeding management, counseled maternity patients on the benefits of breastfeeding, distributed educational materials, and developed public policies to support breastfeeding.

Results from a pre- and post-implementation survey conducted in 1982 and 1985 indicate the tremendous success of the initial pilot project. Analysis of the surveys found that the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of health professionals about promotion of breastfeeding improved. For example, the proportion of health professionals recommending that women initiate breastfeeding at birth increased from less than 40 percent in 1982 to over 75 percent in 1985. Hospitals surveyed reported an elimination of the routine distribution of infant formula and glucose water to healthy infants, and oxytocin to breastfeeding mothers, these having been replaced with the initiation of postpartum breastfeeding. As a result of these changes, the hospitals reported an increase in savings related to the costs of drugs, infant formula, and baby bottles.
Additional USAID funds have been obtained to enable the project to expand its activities to reach a broader target population. The objectives of this second phase will be to determine if the PROALMA model can be successfully transported to semi-rural areas of the country. Additional programme goals include efforts to promote the extended duration of breastfeeding into the weaning period.

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