

Misinformation: Redefining baby feeding

Industry misuses CPS statements

The practice of misinformation is one of the most damaging features of promotions by the infant food industry. The glitzy artificial feeding promos promise solutions to everything from the symptoms of diarrhea to colic and feeding intolerance. Parents are never informed that the very act of artificial feeding is the source of the very problems the same products claim to cure. Misinforming pregnant women and new parents happens in several ways.

by making false statements about their products and
by neglecting to provide key information.

Moreover, to give a credible finish to their claims, the infant food industry needs an authority. When assessing artificial feeding claims, one finds frequent references to the various nutrition statements put out by the Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS).

The CPS statement(1) Meeting the Iron needs of infants and young children: an update is heavily quoted in infant formula promotions. Although continued controversy exists among health care providers regarding the claims and assumptions made in this statement, it is liberally referenced throughout artificial feeding propaganda. One wonders if the implied product endorsement is appreciated by the CPS.

Mead Johnson claims, The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends the use of iron-fortified formula for up to the first year of a baby's life. When taken out of context the CPS quote leaves the impression that all infants need to be fed iron fortified formulas from birth to 12 months. Not a mention is made that the statement applies only to a very small number of infants who need to be fed artificially nor the fact that high intakes of iron by newborns remains controversial as safety and side effects remain largely unknown.

Ross` iron formula promotions use the CPS statement to warn about the dangers of developing anemia if baby is fed cow's milk. While claiming that its formula promotion is the most efficiently absorbed source of iron to prevent the development of iron deficiency anemia in babies, no mention is made that breastmilk iron is far more efficiently absorbed and utilized without any risk of upsetting the bacterial flora of the infants gut or upsetting essential micronutrient ratios. The promotion then goes on claiming that its product should be given to breastfed babies after they are weaned.

Redefinition of key nutrition principles is another tool used to misinform and make false claims.

The term weaning as defined by Jelliffe(2), talks about the "transition" of the "weaning period" when the infant is gradually accustomed to new foods and moves from breastmilk to a full adult diet. Yet any reference to weaning in the infomercials repeatedly refer to weaning from breastmilk to formula.

Of concern is that with increased targeting of expectant women and new parents, most of the nutrition "education" reaching new parents comes from the infant food industry, particularly in low income sectors where attendance at prenatal classes is traditionally low and where the consequences of expensive and low quality nutrition is ill affordable.

References

1. Canadian Pediatric Society Position Statement: Meeting the iron needs of infants and young children: an update. CMAJ 144:1451-1454, 1991. Back
2. Jelliffe, D.B., Jelliffe, E.F., Human Milk in the Modern World. Oxford Medical Publications, Oxford University Press, p. 4, 1978. Back