

Breastfeeding USA: A New Educational Paradigm

By Norma Ritter, IBCLC, RLC, Chair, Education Committee, Breastfeeding USA

Breastfeeding USA, the new national breastfeeding organization, offers many services for mothers and the Breastfeeding Counselors (BCs) who help them. One of its unique offerings is its standardized instruction known as the Centralized Education System. To ensure mothers receive quality breastfeeding help, Breastfeeding USA provides each of its BCs with the same online and telephone preparation in key areas, such as counseling skills, the science of lactation, group set-up and dynamics, and when to refer. During this training, all prospective BCs learn the same material and are quizzed on vital information at the end of each section. This comprehensive course takes about 3 to 4 months to complete and uses in part the innovative Moodle e-learning online software platform. BCs are required to have breastfed a baby for at least a year. Women employed or in school full time may apply to become BCs.

Every BC Candidate is required to read those sections of the 2010 edition of *Counseling the Nursing Mother* by Judith Lauwers and Anna Swisher that are relevant to non- IBCLCs, about 75% of the book. Those entering the BC education course are encouraged to obtain this book. Loaner copies are available for those in financial need.

Mothers who have previous training and experience as breastfeeding helpers and who pass a placement test that measures breastfeeding knowledge currently enroll in an accelerated BC instruction course that typically takes 3 to 4 weeks to complete. Conducted using phone conference calls and an online discussion group, this course includes counseling-skills practice, exploration of case studies, and an orientation to the organization.

Once accredited, Breastfeeding USA recommends each BC use the 2010 book, *Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple* by Nancy Mohrbacher as their reference for helping mothers breastfeed. BCs can contact Breastfeeding USA's Breastfeeding Research and Information Department (BRAID) for help with complicated breastfeeding situations or for accessing research.

Another unique aspect of Breastfeeding USA's educational program is its requirement that accredited BCs obtain continuing education credits to keep their breastfeeding knowledge current.

How much does this state-of-the-art breastfeeding course cost? That's often the biggest surprise. The cost to the Candidate of becoming a Breastfeeding Counselor is currently \$20. For more information on this and other aspects of this new, member-driven organization, see the Breastfeeding USA website: www.BreastfeedingUSA.org.