

February 12, 2013

News Release

For Immediate Release

Breastfeeding Coalition to Offer Consistent Message

A new community-wide collaborative formed this month will focus on support, advocacy and clinical consistency for breastfeeding in the Springfield region.

The Greater Ozarks Regional Breastfeeding Coalition includes physicians, nurses and lactation experts from CoxHealth, Jordan Valley Community Health Center, Mercy Springfield and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, including the department's Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program.

"For the first time, all of the breastfeeding supporters in this community have joined together to provide a consistent message to the community," says Cheryl Blevins, Public Health Nurse with the health department and chair of the new coalition.

The seeds of the Coalition's formation go back to the Community Breastfeeding Conference held in August 2012. At that time, providers and lactation experts recognized a need for more communication and strategic collaboration among local healthcare entities in order to more effectively promote the practice and benefits of breastfeeding.

"Moms were sometimes hearing different things at different places, which could lead to frustration during an already difficult time," Blevins says. "We're trying to ensure consistency of message and even some clinical protocols at clinics, hospitals and at WIC in order to minimize that frustration and be more supportive of mothers."

All of the entities involved in the new coalition have been supporters of breastfeeding efforts for decades, but this is the first time they have come together to form a consistent strategy. The coalition is forming at a time when breastfeeding support is becoming increasingly evidence-based and as healthcare providers are seeking new ways to promote it. It's always been known that this natural practice is healthy and nutritious, but more and more science is now shedding further light on the incredible life-long benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and child.

The Coalition has adopted the slogan, "Breastfeeding: A Gift that Lasts a Lifetime." This reflects not only the gift of milk given from mothers to their infants, but it also reflects the Coalition's first major project – Springfield will soon become a Human Milk Depot site affiliated with the Heart of American Mother's Milk Bank at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, one of just 13 such milk banks in the nation. The depot affiliation means local women, approved as donors by the Kansas City milk bank, will be able to donate their breast milk at the local depot, operated by the health department. The donated milk will be shipped to the Kansas City milk bank for pasteurization and distribution back to local hospitals. Donated milk is already being offered at both CoxHealth and Mercy hospitals.

The Coalition will also sponsor breastfeeding educational programs for healthcare workers and offer workplace support for breastfeeding mothers through consultation and education for employers and co-workers.

For more information on the Greater Ozarks Regional Breastfeeding Coalition, contact: Mike Brothers, Public Health Information Administrator, (417) 874-1205; or Cheryl Blevins, BS, RNC, ANLC, Public Health Nurse, (417) 864-1496.

Providers and experts from CoxHealth, Mercy Springfield and Jordan Valley Community Health Center are also available to media for comment about the Coalition and local breastfeeding efforts. Those interviews can be arranged through each entity's communication staff.

Stacy Fender at CoxHealth: (417) 269-4113 or stacy.fender@coxhealth.com

Sonya Kullmann at Mercy: (417) 820-2426 or sonya.kullmann@mercy.net

Megan Rowe at Jordan Valley Community Health Center: (417) 425-3892 or mrowe@jordanvalley.org