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MOTHER-FRIENDLY CHILDBIRTH INITIATIVE INCLUDED IN WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION BREASTFEEDING PUBLICATION

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida-The Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS) welcomes the World Health Organization's (WHO) recognition of the role that mother-friendly maternity care plays in successful breastfeeding. In particular, a condensed version of CIMS's Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative criteria is included in the WHO's recent publication, *Infant and Young Child Feeding: A tool for assessing national practices, policies, and programmes* (2003). This *Tool* goes out to all WHO member states, which will help to spread the word about mother-friendly childbirth.

The leadership of CIMS approved the condensed version of the evidence-based Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative to serve as an "Example of criteria for mother-friendly care" (Annex 6) around which countries can develop "mother-friendly childbirth strategies." Such strategies "[encourage] birth procedures that are supportive of breastfeeding" and build upon the 1989 joint WHO/UNICEF statement *Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding: the special role of maternity services*.

The *Tool's* primary author, Ann Brownlee, a consultant working with the LINKAGES Project, a USAID funded project for promotion of global breastfeeding, stated "We wanted something to use as a sample, and CIMS has the most developed program, with much thought going into it." Dr. Brownlee noted that "Including sample criteria sensitizes national decision-makers to the benefits of mother-friendly care for breastfeeding, as well as for the mother. This example will alert countries that use the *Tool* to the importance of mother-friendly care and the policies and practices necessary to insure it."

Mary Kroeger, CIMS International Committee Chair, acted as the technical liaison for the *Tool's* development while serving as the WellStart International Maternal and Child Health Coordinator at LINKAGES. She provided guidance on development of the component of the *Tool* focused on "Mother-Friendly Childbirth Strategies", as well as a technical review of other sections of the *Tool*.

Ms. Kroeger stated that the *Tool's* developers chose to feature the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative as an example of mother-friendly care because "CIMS is the most comprehensive and is among the few birth initiatives that include the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative." While some of the WHO's reviewers were initially hesitant about any discussion of mother-friendly care in the *Tool*, they eventually agreed that including the mother-friendly childbirth strategy was worthwhile.

Research shows that many aspects of maternity care have a direct impact on breastfeeding success, particularly support during labor, maternal positioning, fluids in labor, labor pain

medications, surgical procedures, maternal emotional states, and contact with the baby after birth. Furthermore, the physical impact of surgical procedures such as vacuum extraction, forceps, and cesarean section can affect the newborn's ability to suck and breastfeed.

This *Tool* is a companion to the WHO's *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*. While the two publications were initially being developed separately, the WHO recognized that the *Tool* would serve as a useful "needs assessment tool" for countries hoping to implement the *Global Strategy* and thus asked to collaborate with LINKAGES to jointly finalize, field-test and publish the *Tool*. The *Global Strategy* also includes a call for "increasing access to antenatal care and education about breastfeeding, to delivery practices which support breastfeeding and to follow-up care which helps to ensure continued breastfeeding."

Both the *Tool* and the *Global Strategy* can be found on the WHO's web site at:
<http://www.who.int/nut/publications.htm#inf>.

The Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS), a United Nations recognized NGO, is a collaborative effort of numerous individuals, leading researchers, and more than 50 organizations representing over 90,000 members. Promoting a wellness model of maternity care that will improve birth outcomes and substantially reduce costs, CIMS developed the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative in 1996. A consensus document that has been recognized as an important model for improving the healthcare and well being of children beginning at birth, the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative has been translated into several languages and is gaining support around the world.
