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Influence of individualized professional support on the breastfeeding rates in ten individual family practices from Romania

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Background: Infant nutrition is an important public health issue. Breastfeeding, due to the protective nutrients of human milk, is considered to be beneficial for the health and wellbeing of infants, at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. According to a study conducted in 2010 by the Alfred Rusescu Institute for Mother and Child Care, the rates of exclusive breastfeeding up to six months were very low (12.6%) in Romania, placing our country amongst the last in the European area. There were two goals of this study: to reveal the impact of individualized professional support and education for families and caregivers on the duration of breastfeeding, and to investigate the reasons behind early discontinuation of breastfeeding.

Methods: The prevalence rates of exclusive breastfeeding and of overall breastfeeding were analysed in ten individual practices from six geographic areas (Bucharest, Cluj, Iasi, Bistrita, Targu Mures and Braila), on three cohorts of children, born in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Interventions sought to increase the duration of breastfeeding and professional support was provided during both the prenatal and postpartum periods. Family doctors involved in the breastfeeding education process tried to increase mothers' knowledge and skills and they helped them view breastfeeding as normal and beneficial for both mother and child.

Results: Non-supportive family, mothers' early return to work, infant inability to latch on to maternal breast, infant receiving supplemental feedings, prematurity, mothers' obesity, maternal anxiety or depression, previous history of breastfeeding failure, infant anomaly and inappropriate complementary feeding were some of the reasons for early discontinuation of breastfeeding.

Conclusions: Family doctors play a critical role in their practices and communities as advocates of breastfeeding. In order to increase the duration of breastfeeding it is important to develop targeted breastfeeding promotion strategies at a national level.