As Nutrition and Physical Activity Coordinator for California’s Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Division, Suzanne Haydu was intimately involved in developing and implementing the Division’s Birth and Beyond California: Hospital Breastfeeding Quality Improvement and Staff Training Project (BBC). Initiated in 2007, the project sought to improve hospitals’ maternity care practices to provide stronger support for exclusive breastfeeding.

About BBC

Working through the Regional Perinatal Programs of California (RPPC), BBC targeted hospitals in three regions that had the lowest rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the state and provided these hospitals with support and resources to adopt policies and practices to increase exclusive breastfeeding. Suzanne and four other staff in the MCAH Division worked closely with the Breastfeeding Task Force of Greater Los Angeles, Children and Families’ Commission in Orange County, the Hospital Association of Southern California, and the San Joaquin County Breastfeeding Consortium, as well as the RPPC teams.

The main focus of Birth and Beyond California was on integrating quality improvement (QI) in the maternity setting. The project activities included:

- Educating hospital administrators in Decision-Maker Workshops.
- Working with administrators to develop multi-disciplinary QI teams who would review and revise hospital policies and procedures to provide greater support for exclusive breastfeeding.
- Facilitating monthly Regional Hospital Network meetings with participating hospitals to assist with problem-solving and promote collaboration.
- Providing staff education, including:
  - Learner Workshops (16 hours): for hospital staff to promote mother-infant bonding through skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding support.
  - Train-the-Trainer Workshops (8-16 hours): to train hospital staff to become BBC trainers to meet future staff training needs.

About Suzanne

Suzanne specifically brought several key pieces to the project as a public health nutritionist with the state health department. As a leader in promoting optimum infant nutrition as an upstream approach to reduce obesity, Suzanne wrote a grant incorporating this perspective and two state budget change proposals to seek funding for the BBC project. It was that persistence that motivated her Division Chief to allocate Title V funds to launch the project. As a leader in the BBC program, Suzanne was responsible for project development, team communication, contract deliverables and consensus building for the final report.

Suzanne has served as the Nutrition and Physical Activity Coordinator for the California Department of Health’s MCAH Division for nearly two decades. She was trained in lay midwifery, and she assisted in a labor and delivery clinic as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi.
Exciting Results from BBC

Twenty-three hospitals participated in the project, with nearly 200 hospital administrators involved and 685 staff and managers trained. Eighty-seven staff became trainers and have subsequently trained nearly 2,000 additional staff.

Suzanne reports many exciting and unexpected results from Birth and Beyond California. One is that most of the participating hospitals continued on with the program after BBC’s funding ended. Another is that three hospitals gained the Baby Friendly designation after the BBC training, even though achieving this designation was not one of BBC’s original goals.

Yet another positive result is that the state of Vermont is planning to adapt the program for its use. The Vermont Department of Health wants to implement the Birth and Beyond 16-hour Learner Workshop as part of a quality improvement project focused on increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates in Vermont. It is exciting indeed that a program that was successful in California can be easily adapted for a state as different from California as Vermont! The beauty of BBC in California is that of the three perinatal regions that were involved, one of those regions, the Central Valley, is a very rural area. The BBC team took somewhat of a different approach in the Central Valley than it did in the two other regions, Los Angeles and Orange County, both of which are very urban. For example, the BBC team worked more by phone, as the distances were too great to do everything in person. Vermont can learn from the BBC team’s experience working in the Central Valley.

Lessons Learned

Suzanne reports a number of lessons learned, in addition to the four main lessons outlined in the BBC report:

- Hospitals often compete for patients and want to be known as providing the best care in their area. Yet when hospital administrators came together, they were eager to share their problems and experiences; sometimes they learned that they weren’t doing the best job!

- Quality improvement teams work for the entire hospital; they include diverse members. BBC found that often the teams needed additional members to generate a shared commitment to improving breastfeeding outcomes for new mothers.

- Many of the nurses who attended the training were not supportive of exclusive breastfeeding when they came into the classroom. Yet when
they observed others sharing skin-to-skin time with their newborns, they were amazed and they loved what they saw!

- Some of the things that the BBC team thought would be obstacles proved not to be. Hospital staff and new moms were not opposed to foregoing the free infant formula packs. Physicians were not opposed to skin-to-skin contact right after birth, and moms were fine with not bathing their baby until after that first skin-to-skin time.

In thinking about how she might want to do things differently, Suzanne felt strongly that she would only run a training session for hospital upper management if the hospital CEO attended. She believes that the effort needs support from the CEO. In addition, Suzanne would like to update the training curricula with new information, and she would like to have BBC take its own photos for the curricula; without having to buy rights to the photos, other states could easily use BBC’s training curricula.